BARBARA DERING

A SEQUEL TO THE QUICK OR THE DEAD

AMÉLIE RIVES

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Elizabeth P. Saunders

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A SEQUEL TO

THE QUICK OR THE DEAD?

BY

AMÉLIE RIVES.

"——Life teaches us
To be less strict with others and ourselves:
Thou'lt learn the lesson, too. So wonderful
Is human nature, and its varied ties
Are so involved and complicate, that none
May hope to keep his inmost spirit calm
And walk without perplexity through life."

GOETHE: *Iphigenia.*

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"*Socrates. . . . Every discourse, once written, is tossed about from hand to hand, equally among those who understand it and those for whom it is in no wise fitted; and it does not know to whom it ought, and to whom it ought not, to speak. And when misunderstood and unjustly attacked, it always needs its parent to help it; for, unaided, it can neither retaliate nor defend itself.*"—*Plato: Phædrus.*

BARBARA DERING.

I.

More than two years had passed since Dering left Rosemary. There was a soft, gold-gray mist over everything; the tulip-tree leaves glimmered a pale yellow against the dark evergreens on the lawn; the Indian-corn, standing in great tasselled shocks, gave forth a dry rustle now and then as a field-creature scampered through it; a crow could be heard sometimes very faintly, as though drowsing on its listless, slow-moving wings; but, except for such noises, the warm autumn day was silent and the air still.

Barbara was walking through the cornfield, reading as she went. Her figure, in its dimly-tinted gown, looked thinner. She was pale, and her mouth had a tired bend at its fine corners.

Under her broad hat her hair was gathered into a sleekly-plaited great knot, like that of a school-girl. She looked younger, and at the same time there was an expression of deeper experience in her large eyes, as she lifted them gravely from her book to the murky blue of the hills or the rich coloring of the meadows through which she was passing.

Presently she came to some words which seemed to her like a personal message:

"*As long as suffering seems grievous to thee and thou seekest to fly from it, so long will it be ill with thee, and the*

tribulation from which thou fliest will everywhere follow thee.

"*If thou set thyself to do what thou oughtest, that is, to suffer and to die to thyself, it will quickly be better with thee, and thou wilt find peace.*"

"I do try," she said aloud, as though speaking to some invisible presence. Her lip quivered a little, like that of a child when it wishes to signify that it means to be good, and she looked up appealingly into the calm sky above her, which seemed like a symbol of the peace for which she yearned.

Barbara had outgrown much of her old, wayward impulsiveness in these long, lonely months. She seemed to herself to have faded mentally, as pastel portraits fade sometimes, until their once vivid colors are only dull half-tones. She seemed to have lost even her power of suffering keenly. The pain that haunted her was scarcely more than that sense of heaviness with which a narcotic veils physical anguish. Usually, when she thought of Dering, it was with a pitying regret for the misery which she had caused him,—sometimes with a swift, fleeting desire to have him with her. She was very lonely.

"He hates me, I suppose," she told herself. "He thinks dreadful things of me; but I deserve it. It is only what I ought to bear. I ought to have been brave and to have borne what I brought upon myself. After all, life is so very, very short. I am nearly twenty-nine now. I believe women change a great deal between twenty-six and thirty. I could have made him happy if I could only have conquered my miserable self. How morbid I was! It seemed to me that Val was following me and laughing at me with some one else. As if the great, wise dead could condescend to such pettiness!

It was very awful. I seem to have passed through a furnace. There is no sap of life left in me. And yet one longs so for love, for companionship." Her eyes filled slowly with tears which did not fall. She began to read again, and again the words seemed like a message:

"*What I have given I can justly take away, and restore it again, when I please.*

"*When I give it, it is still mine; when I take it away again, I take not anything that is thine; for every best gift and every perfect gift is mine.*"

"How strangely God speaks to me out of books!" thought Barbara, with her old conviction in Heaven-sent coincidences. "How sweet these dear, old-fashioned sentences are!" She lifted the little volume and pressed her lips upon the open page with more emotion than she had felt for a long while.

A gun fired suddenly in the next field made her start. Something in the man's dress and bearing, as he walked after the rabbit he had shot, reminded her of Dering. She stood still, and her heart began to beat quickly.

"How strange such likenesses are!" she said to herself. "But I must ask him not to fire so near the house. It will frighten away the birds on the lawn."

The sportsman proved to be a young Canadian, whom she knew slightly, and he promised not to fire again until he had reached the northwest end of the meadow. In spite of this, however, Barbara decided to go still farther away into the woods. The sound of a gun always irritated her; so she walked rather rapidly until she reached a large tree just within the outer fringe of the forest. As she looked at it she was swept suddenly back into the past as though on a

strong wind of memory. It was the tree in which Dering had found her playing with the greyhounds. She put her ungloved hand against the rough bark and gazed at it curiously. How such a thing would have made her suffer two years ago! Presently she sighed and withdrew her hand.

"I wonder if it's better to be like this?" she asked herself. "I seem only half alive."

Then sitting down on the trunk of a fallen tree, she tried to fix her attention again upon her book. But somehow her thoughts wandered. She seemed to see Dering, to hear his voice, as though he were actually with her. The words of À Kempis grew suddenly cold and unreal to her fancy, as though written from a stand-point too much apart from human interest.

Barbara was one of the women who idealize the absent. She remembered only the kind and sympathetic moods of Dering. His harsh words had all been forgotten. Like most generous, impulsive characters, she forgave fully and forgot in spite of herself, and when she wished to record some offence committed against her, unless she wrote it down at once, she had a blurred and incoherent memory of it in less than a fortnight. Dering appeared to her always pale and sorrowful, never rough and indignant. Often she had an almost intolerable desire to write to him and beg him to send her some words of forgiveness with which to comfort herself in moments of acute self-reproach. The thought of his saddened life made her heart settle heavily in her breast. She could not analyze the feeling exactly. She wished to see him, and yet the thought of it was painful. She longed for his companionship, and yet dreaded the revival of the old unrest that it might bring. She would have given much

to ask his forgiveness personally, and yet the fear of hearing him refuse it filled her with a childish terror.

"If I could see him, just for a minute, I think it would help me," she murmured. A long, catching sigh broke from her, and she let her forehead sink against her upturned palms. Some one stepped upon the fallen leaves at her side. "Barbara," said the voice of Dering.

II.

Barbara did not look up at once. For an instant she was overcome with actual, sharp, physical fear. Then, with the effort that we sometimes make to wake from a terrifying dream, she started convulsively and lifted her eyes to his face. She was so white that he, in his turn, grew frightened.

"I ought to have let them tell you. I have hurt you. Forgive me," he said, speaking in the old rapid way, that seemed as familiar as the brown-leaved oaks about them.

"What can I do? Tell me. Let me help you," he urged. "I'm miserable about it. Great blundering idiot that I am!"

"It—was—so—sudden," Barbara managed to say. Her lips were still colorless. "I was thinking of—of you just at that moment. Things startle me more than they used to."

"You don't look as strong as you did," he said, anxiously; then with great gentleness, "My poor Barbara!"

"Please don't," she said, trembling. "I can't bear it." He sat down beside her and lifted the fallen

book mechanically from the ground. "The same old À Kempis!" he could not help exclaiming, with a smile. "Do you still open books for advice and comfort as you used to do?"

"I know it's very childish," she said, flushing.

"I always loved it in you," he answered, rather absently. "But what heavy markings! And here's a page all puckered. *Dear!*" he ended, with a sudden change of voice, "How you must have been suffering all this time!"

"It was fair; I deserved it," she said, eagerly. "I'm so glad to be able to tell you that. I think I'm a better woman for it. Please don't think I'm pretending to be humble. These things are so hard to say. But I hope you will believe me."

"Your face shows it," he answered, looking at her. "What a wonder you are! I thought I might have exaggerated your eyes in this long absence. But I haven't. They're marvellous. And there's something more—more—I don't mean 'womanly' exactly. Help me out, dear. We were always frank with each other."

"Perhaps you mean they are gentler?" she suggested, almost timidly. "I've changed very, very much in some things." She turned away suddenly from his steady gaze, a deep crimson floating even over her smooth throat.

"Have you?" he said. "I wish I thought you had changed 'very, very much' in one particular thing, Barbara." He paused, so that her name lingered on her ear like a caress, before the sentence was finished. "You must know why I am here."

She could think of nothing to say. Her lips refused to move and she trembled.

"But you shall not have more pain to bear," he

continued. "Don't look like that, as though you were afraid of me."

"No, no; indeed I'm not," she whispered.

"Well, then, try to be quiet. I'll only say gentle, soothing things. And if I make you unhappy I'll go away without another word."

"No, no!" protested Barbara, her lips quivering; and then with a sudden, uncontrollable burst of tears she sobbed out, "It is so good to see you. I have missed you so."

Dering sat rigidly self-controlled, beating the palm of one hand softly with his doubled fist, in his determination not to startle or offend her by any demonstration of feeling, and in a few moments she was quite calm again.

"I haven't cried for a long while," she said at last, in a shy voice. "I'm dreadfully ashamed of myself. I think it must have been the shock of seeing you so suddenly."

"Why, of course it was," he assured her. "The most natural thing in the world. But I'm afraid you've been on a great strain."

"I think it's more the loneliness," she said, simply. "One gets so pent up."

"Gad! I know the feeling," exclaimed Dering. "I never could talk of myself to any one but you. Other chaps chaff so, and, as a rule, I make an awful mess of it with women."

There was silence for a few moments, and then he said suddenly,—

"Take off your hat, will you? I've a fancy to see you without it."

Barbara drew out the long pin which fastened it above her plaits and uncovered her shining head.

"Yes, I thought so," said Dering. "You've got it arranged differently. You look more like the Milo than ever with that crinkly parting. And you've got a little nick in your right eyebrow just as she has."

"I'm afraid mine is nothing more romantic than a scar from varioloid," replied Barbara.

"Well, it's delightful, all the same. By Jove! that parted hair makes you look wonderfully meek!"

"I feel meek," she said, with a smile.

"Then it's just a mental coiffure, too, which you happen to wear this afternoon. Fancy you meek!"

"I see you don't believe how I have changed."

"I confess I can't accept the idea of your meekness."

"I shall have to prove it to you."

"There are ways I could suggest."

"Of course people might differ in their ideas of meekness."

"Of course."

"Some people might call spiritlessness meekness."

"Well, isn't it?"

"No, I don't think so; not exactly."

"You are much thinner, too," observed Dering, with irrelevancy.

"Am I?" she asked, pinching mechanically her loose sleeve. "Yes, I suppose I am; but then I always was a *fausse maigre*."

"I don't like to see you looking so pale, either."

"No, I don't like that," confessed Barbara, candidly. "I often wish it wasn't vulgar to use a touch of rouge."

"Rouge is devilish," said Dering, harshly. "If a woman whom I liked were to use rouge and I found it out, I believe I should hate her."

"How unjust!" exclaimed Barbara. "It's nothing but a custom, after all."

"It has disagreeable associations. I've always thought it a hideous idea. But your paleness is lovely. I only dislike it because it means you have been ill."

"Oh, no!" said Barbara. "I'm almost terribly healthy. Sometimes I have thought that physical pain would be a great relief."

"Oh, you poor soul!" exclaimed the young man. He half put out his hand impetuously, then drew it back.

"You have changed, too," she said, after a while. "You are thinner yourself."

"Oh, I've been knocking about so. For one thing, I walked a good bit over the Himalayas with an English officer not long ago; I got pretty sick of it, too!"

"I wish women could do that sort of thing," sighed Barbara.

"Well, so they can nowadays."

"Yes; but one doesn't like the idea of scampering around the globe by one's self."

"I should think not," said Dering, with rather a grim smile. "I—should—think—not," he repeated, slowly, this time with a laugh. Barbara rose under a sudden impulse.

"It is getting chilly," she suggested. "Suppose we walk."

The sun had appeared through a molten-looking gap in the gray clouds, and there was an uncertain wind. As they walked the haze gradually cleared, and a great green-gold star flared out in the north-east.

"How I love the smell of the corn!" said Barbara, throwing back her head with one of her free gestures, "and the pennyroyal! It is the essence of autumn to me." She stooped, and gathering a spray of the

little, transparent blue flowers, with their rough, dark leaves, crushed it, to bring out still more the pungent odor, and held it close to her nostrils.

"How keen you are about everything!" exclaimed Dering.

"No, not about everything," she answered, seriously. "I was thinking to-day how much less I feel things than I used to. Sometimes I fancy I have quite the sensations of a very old person."

"That's first-rate!" he cried, laughing. "There never was such a *naïve* creature. No wonder other women seem flat after you."

"Do they?' asked Barbara, out of sheer embarrassment, not at all knowing what she said.

"As bits of paper," answered Dering, briefly.

Barbara could not help laughing. "You seem rather fond of playing with paper-dolls, then," she retorted. "I have heard of you in London and Paris and Rome. And this summer I am sure you were very gay at Newport. I even heard the name of the young girl you were engaged to."

"I've been trying awfully hard to fall in love with some one ever since I last saw you," said Dering, honestly. Barbara was glad that the purplish veil of the twilight hung betwen them.

She felt that he was watching her narrowly. As they passed under the low-hanging boughs of an old cherry-tree, she saw that here and there upon the sleek twigs were little knots of white bloom.

"Why, it's blossoming—and in September!" she exclaimed. She broke off a bit and held it out to him.

"Thank you, Barbara," he said, quietly. "Spring flowers in autumn. It is a good omen. I feel cheered."

III.

"How is Siegfried the fair, the unlovable, the tiger-lily maid of Rosemary?" asked Dering, as they went up the low stone steps at the back of the house. "Does she still knit as many baby-socks and drop as many stitches as ever?"

"How absurd! I had forgot that you called her 'Siegfried,'" laughed Barbara. "Yes, she is just the same."

"Everything seems the same," he said, with a sort of curt breath that was his nearest approach to a sigh. "But where are you taking me? This isn't the way to the drawing-room."

"No. I'm a great musician now. I have a music-room."

They went up a short stair-way and she opened a door. Before them lay a long, wide apartment, with a large window at one end, which framed the dying light without, and through which they saw the vapory saffron of the just-risen moon magnified by the mists, which were again gathering. Beyond, the fields lay dully gold, fretted with violet shadows, and some dead acacias were etched against a rose-brown sky. A curious smell of lemons, fur, and flowers filled the room. In the immense fireplace the core of a wood-fire glowed richly. There were heavy curtains of crimson brocade, and the walls were panelled to the ceiling with light oak. A grand piano stood among a little group of lemon-trees in one corner.

Pictures of the sea, in storm and calm, hung low,

above the lounging chairs, and carved tables. There was a lion-skin on the hearth.

"I spend most of my time here," said Barbara. "I have never played for you, have I?"

"No. You had no piano when I was here before. I love music. Can't I have some now?"

"Presently; but let us get warm first. You know my lazy ways. To be entirely happy I must have on a tea-gown. I will send you some tea while I am gone."

Left alone, Dering threw himself on a sofa which was drawn up to one side of the fireplace, settled down among the heap of cushions, with his head thrown back on his interlaced fingers and his eyes closed. The feeling uppermost in his brain was that he was again under the same roof with Barbara. Somewhere, not far away, she was brushing out the ripples of her vivid hair; the things that she loved and touched daily were all about him; the very cushions upon which his head rested held that perfume of Iris and Damask roses with which he always associated her. She would come again in a few moments, and he would speak with her and watch the firelight in her eyes and on her glancing throat. Barbara—Barbara—Barbara,—the very name had a strange charm and vitality in it. How short now seemed the years which had been so long spent away from her!

"All things come to him who knows how to wait," he muttered, drowsily, and just as he finished speaking the door opened and she stole in. He gazed at her curiously as she came forward with long, slow steps, and at last stood silent before the fire, looking down at her graceful hands, which she held out as though to warm them. She was all in white. An old necklace

of seed-pearls and great green jewels made splashes of color in the flickering light.

"That is the same gown you used to wear," he said, quietly, though his heart was jumping.

"Yes," was all that she answered.

"But I never saw the necklace before."

"No; it's an old family relic. These aren't real; they're what the French call *bijoux de fantaisie.* It's a French thing."

There was a pause.

"Will you play for me now?" asked Dering, finally.

"Are you sure that you really love music?" she returned, smiling.

"I tell you I dote on it!" he exclaimed, rather impatiently. "Please don't tease me."

"Very well," said Barbara, docilely, and moved towards the piano. A low, murmuring melody began to float through the room. Dering, who loved music without comprehending it, closed his eyes and drew in his breath luxuriously, half fancying that the light touch of her fingers was falling upon his hair. He told himself that he had had a bad dream last night, that no surly years of dogged resolution separated the past from the present, and that when she took her hands from the piano-keys she would come and slip them into his with the old freedom. But instead, she let her white length sink slowly into a deep chair on the other side of the fireplace, and said that she was too tired to play any more. A little Angora kitten trotted suddenly out of the shadows, and jumping upon her knee, began to pat with one paw at the jewel which fastened her gown. She caressed it smiling, and Dering could hear distinctly its loud purr of delight. Somehow this irritated him.

"You used not to like cats," he said, rather gruffly.

"But I always liked kittens," returned Barbara.

"That distinction's a little beyond me."

"Why, they're quite different, I think. Kittens are dear mites, so—so—— Could one say cuddlesome?"

"One could if one felt the need," he answered, with the dry laugh that she remembered.

"Now I've vexed you!" she exclaimed, penitently. "Get down, Miggles." Miggles struck the lion-skin with a soft bounce, and began to play good-naturedly with her evasive tail.

"What has become of the greyhounds?" said Dering.

"Oh, they sucked eggs so that they had to go. But I have a supreme favorite now that takes the place of all the rest."

"What on earth can that be?—A bear cub?" he suggested, crossly. Barbara laughed.

"No. It's my horse, Wilful. Such a dear! The color of my hair, with a white splash on his forehead. And red-silk nostrils. His muzzle would fit in a tea-cup, and yet he's seventeen hands. Such hoofs! like black onyx, and his pasterns spring out of them like gold-flames. He's as wild as a hawk, and I was going to say as kind as a kitten, but the simile might jar," she ended, mischievously. She could never resist teasing him in one of his surly fits.

"This is another new taste," he said, still grum. "I didn't know you rode."

"Yes, very well," she assured him, with feigned gravity. "I'll put Wilful over some fences for you."

"Snake-fences?" asked Dering, with his grin. "If he jumps snake-fences, you ought to call him Pegasus."

"How very witty!" said Barbara, and they both

laughed. Neither spoke for some moments, and then Dering said, suddenly,—

"Hold up your hand a second."

She did so, wondering.

"No. Your left hand."

She drew it from under the kitten, which had again jumped into her lap, and lifted it in the firelight, then started and flushed, dropping it among the folds of her gown.

"So you found it?" asked Dering, whose mood was undoubtedly malign.

"I—I hate you when you speak to me like that!" she cried, springing imperiously to her great height. "You make me hate you!" she repeated, passionately. Her heart had not throbbed with such emotion for many months.

Dering's eyes were masterful. As he gazed at her in silence she turned her head nervously aside, and presently went over to the open window, through which the moonlight now fell in a long, barred pattern upon the polished floor. He followed her. She heard his voice at her shoulder.

"You'd be apt to forgive what a man said under thumb-screws,—eh, Barbara?"

"You can be so horribly cruel," she gasped.

"And you?"

"I have done nothing,—nothing."

"Not this time, but that evening we were both thinking of just now."

"When you say things like that to me you change all my thoughts."

"Thoughts of what, may I ask?"

"Of you."

"Of me? Barbara!"

"No! don't touch me. You have been too cruel. Don't,—don't!"

But he had her hands in his. Their eyes defied each other. In the man's was a certain mocking look. She saw it at once and her pupils spread with anger.

"You wild thing! You tigress! How you would like to hurt me! But I have you fast."

"Let me go! You rouse all the wickedness in me. You make me wicked. I felt so gentle to you. I wished to make amends to you. When you hold me like this something in me rises against you." Her voice changed suddenly to a sort of wail: "Jock! Jock! do you really mean to hurt me so?"

She felt him drop to his knees beside her and draw the soft stuff of her gown close about his face. They remained in this position for a second or two, quite silent, then she stooped and touched his curls timidly with her lips.

"Oh, Barbara!" he whispered, with a great boyish sigh, and, putting up his hand, pressed her cheek against his, and so held her in her bending attitude.

"Is it sweet?" he asked presently, still in a whisper.

"Yes," she answered, trembling.

"As it used to be?"

"More," trembling greatly.

"More? Darling, then give me your lips."

"No, no! Let me go now. To-morrow,—to-morrow, Jock. I promise. Indeed, indeed! Let me go."

"To-morrow, then? You swear it?"

"Yes, yes! I swear it."

"But when, to-morrow? Where? When, Barbara?"

"I don't know. Only let me go, now. I am ill,—I am dizzy. I have promised. You hurt my throat keeping it bent so."

"One minute. Let me kiss you."

"I cannot. I must not. It is for life and death this time. It will be final. I must think,—I must pray. I tell you, you are really hurting me."

"Well, then!" He released her, with a quick breath, and jumped to his feet; but before he could speak to her again she had slipped past him with a supple movement and left the room.

IV.

THE next morning, while he was drinking his coffee in the same lodging that he had occupied on his former visit to the neighborhood, Beauregard Walsingham entered and placed a small blue envelope beside his plate. Dering's heart gave a quick flare of expectation, and he handed Beauregard a silver piece, which the small black at once tucked away into one of his cheeks with his old gesture and a low bow of thanks. When he was alone, Dering tore open the envelope with an eagerness which gave his eyes a stern glare and drew a deep mark between his dark brows. As he read, the expression of his face died into a pale quietude, and he ended by crumpling the note slowly in one hand and tossing it into the fire. It had run as follows:

"There is to be a country dance to-night at an overseer's house two miles from here. I know his wife very well, and have helped her to nurse her children in illness, so I can invite myself and bring any friend I choose with me. Aunt Fridis will chaperon us. I

fancy it will be very funny. Do you care to come? I am going. B."

When Dering reached Rosemary that evening Barbara was not ready, but she entered in a few moments buttoning her long glove. Her short gown of transparent black with its gold belt gave her a girlish look. Her hair was twisted high into a sort of helmet shape, and in it sparkled a winged-comb of small diamonds.

"You beauty!" said Dering, under his breath, watching her from his place at the mantle-shelf, but not coming towards her.

"What?" she asked, a little nervously. "I didn't hear what you said."

"Oh, I'll tell you all about it on our way home," said Dering, quietly. "I suppose our Siegfried is very wonderful in ball attire?"

"No; she's rather nice. I did her myself."

Miss Fridiswig here entered in a dark-green silk with black lace draperies. Her pink curls had been imprisoned into careful plaits, and her small red nose elaborately powdered. She giggled and circled about Dering, flirting her unusual costume this way and that for his admiration.

"You're positively stunning, Miss Fridis," he assured her, and she coyly fastened in his button-hole a white carnation and a bit of fern as a reward for this gallant speech.

The road was terribly rough, but there was brilliant moonlight, and they did not seem long in reaching the scene of the dance. Along the whitewashed fence, which surrounded what in Virginia is so often called "the circle,"—that is, the round plot of grass edged with a carriage-way,—they saw traps of all sorts and

unsaddled horses. The monotonous sound of a tinny piano and two fiddles scraped against their ears.

Inside was a merry noise of dancing, laughter, and shrieking. Barbara grew quite excited, and the small feet of Miss Fridiswig pattered on the floor of the carriage.

"Come!" cried Barbara. "Do let's hurry! I'm afraid we're late now!"

They entered a narrow hall lighted by a kerosene-lamp, and a glistening black girl beckoned them upstairs to take off their wraps. When they came down their hostess met them, affable and glowing in a costume of lace window-curtain over Turkey-red calico.

"Now, this cert'n'y *is* nice of you to come, Mis' Pomfret! The gyrls cert'n'y *will* be pleased!" she said, clasping Barbara's arm in a moist but hospitable palm. "They're darncin' th' Coquette. All the young fellows 're engaged, but you'n Mr.—Mr.——"

"This is Mr. Dering, Mrs. Twampler," put in Barbara, flushing.

"You'n Mr. Dering 'll make ellergant partners." Then she broke off and stared at Dering in a way that made him frown.

He had given a swift guess at what happened to be the truth,—namely, that Mrs. Twampler had heard the story of his former acquaintance with Barbara.

His frown deepened into an air of such grimness that his hostess gave a nervous laugh and began to arrange the large hair-brooch which dented her ample chin.

She then provided chairs for Barbara and Dering, who said that they did not know how to dance "The Coquette," and, after seeing them settled, bore Miss Fridiswig away.

"Try not to look quite so glum," whispered Barbara, presently, fanning herself and looking at the dancers, as though not thinking of her companion. "I thought it would amuse you. You really make me feel as though I were boring you."

"Did you ever try to find Mark Twain funny when you didn't feel in the humor?"

"Ye-es."

"Well, then, you have an excellent idea of my present sensations."

"But act a little. Can't you pretend? After all, it's not very flattering to me."

"What on earth made you bring me to this confounded place, then? It's enough to put a seraph out of temper. Idiots!"

"I'm sure I didn't urge you to come."

"No; but you knew perfectly well that I would. I was determined to see you to-day."

"Now that you see me, you don't seem to appreciate it."

"In this den? I fancy not!"

Barbara was silent, trying not to laugh. The fact was that she had taken this desperate means of delaying her interview with Dering, and could not help finding his impotent rage amusing, although her soul was torn with its great struggle. She had not slept the night before. The hand that held her fan trembled, and tears were as near her eyes as laughter to her lips.

"Good Lord! this is too much!" burst forth Dering suddenly in a whispered explosion. "There's that infernal ass!"

"Who? Where?" asked Barbara, startled.

"Why, there in front of you, dancing this monkey-

shine. I forget what it's called. There! in that flowered waistcoat. Our old friend Buzzy! *What* an ape!"

"Hush!" said Barbara. "He hasn't seen us. Don't look at him."

Buzzy, who was "coquetting" to a huge girl in blue silesia, fastened up her square, waistless back with white shoe-buttons, capered on, unconscious of the angry eyes which Dering had fastened upon his pomatumed locks. He wore a dress-coat too large for him, lined and faced with bright blue satin, a tie to match, and a waistcoat embroidered with rose-buds.

The Coquette is a dance which is executed in the following manner: the company being arranged in a circle, the young man or woman whose turn it is to coquette advances with coy movements, which keep time to a spirited tune, towards the person opposite. At the last moment a toss of the head or a tantalizing placing of the hands behind the back signifies that the male or female coquette has decided to select a different partner, and this engaging performance is renewed indefinitely.

Had Dering not been in one of his most perverse moods he would have driven a much longer distance over rougher roads to see Buzzy's present antics; but there are moments in which our sense of humor seems crowded out by fiercer emotions, and Dering followed with sombre eyes the evolutions of the flowered waistcoat about the silesia bodice. He even watched, without a smile, one lank woman of thirty-five, who was at least six feet tall, and who wore a pale-green cotton-velvet corsage over a skirt of pink tarlatan, giggle through the most complicated contortions before six different swains, and select finally a dapper little youth of twenty with a cosey dimple in his chapped chin. Once only during the evening was there so much as a flicker

about his lips. It was when, just before supper, the women, old and young, left the room, and returned having their front ringlets frankly powdered with flour. Brunette and blonde alike had adopted this *coiffure*, and bore themselves with a self-satisfied air, evidently the result of conscious beauty.

After supper—a repast of which Dering had refused to partake, in spite of Barbara's urgings—a polka was struck up, and Mrs. Twampler was seen coming towards them with the blue-silesia young woman hanging behind, but still advancing, though reluctantly.

"Mis' Pomfret, this is Miss Huggins from over Turkey Mountain. Mr. Dering, sir, let me interjuce yuh tuh Mis' Huggins. She's mighty light on her feet," she added, as though in apology for the young lady's solid figure. "She's heaps the bes' darncer down our way. I hope, sir," she continued, extending one comfortable hand, upon which rested the fat white fingers of Miss Huggins, boneless and with square, dark-rimmed tips,—"I hope, sir, you'll oblige me by darncin' this polka with her, as yuh don't seem tuh be havin' a very gay time."

Barbara was at first too appalled by Dering's expression to feel any inclination to laugh, but as she saw him helplessly advance and place his arm across the vast back of Miss Huggins, she started up, and, after looking wildly about her for an instant, rushed to the nearest window and, flinging up the sash, thrust her head far out into the frosty glare.

"Mind! that button's loose!" called Mrs. Twampler, following her. "What's the matter? Th' room too warm?"

"Yes, yes," murmured Barbara. "Can we stay here a little while, Mrs. Twampler?"

"Why or cose," said Mrs. Twampler, cheerily. "Yuh *do* look sorter weakish. Will yuh have some blackb'ry cordial?"

"No, thank you so much You are very, very kind," said Barbara, who was apt to gush to the lower classes in her excessive desire to be civil. "I never drink cordials."

"Don't yuh, now? Why, yuh look's if 'twould be reel good fuh yuh. Do yuh have rheumatism? Poke-b'ry an' whiskey's perffeckly ellergant fuh rheumatism. Lemme give yuh haffer bottle. Do now?"

"No, no, I never have rheumatism; but thank you ever so much all the same. How delicious this air is! Is—is Mr. Dering still dancing?"

"No, he ain't darncin' now. He's fannin' Pussy Huggins. She does darnce beautiful that girl, though yoh wouldn't think it from her fat. But then fat people oughtn't tuh be so heavy by rights. I've heard tell as how reel fat people float in th' water like corks. Is it true, you reckon?"

"I—I don't know," said Barbara, hesitatingly. "I think it is."

"Well, I 'clare!" exclaimed Mrs. Twampler. "It's hard tuh take in, ain't it, now? But you'd better come 'way from this winder 'fore yuh ketch yo' death. Oh, here's my nephew, Horace Buzzy. I think you wuz very kynd tuh him onct on th' way tuh Charlottesville. Didn't his waggin break down, or somethin'?"

"Did you say his first name was—was Horace?" asked Barbara in a low voice, with her head still out of the window.

"Yes. His ma loves them hifalutin' names. He's got a sister name Una, an' another name Antonet, an' his little buddy's called Norval. You know it's from

that verse of poetry 'bout th' Grampus hills. Somebody told me th' other day that them hills went under water in Scotland an' came up in Faginia ez th' Blue Ridge, but I reckon they wuz gasin'. Here's Horace now. Howdy Horace. O' cose you know Mis' Pomfret?"

"Well, I reckon! hyah! hyah!" exclaimed Buzzy. "Wuzn't that 'bout th' wust busted waggin ever you saw, Mis' Pomfret?" Then, without waiting for a reply, "See yo' fren's back. Wuzn't he *jess ragin'* with me 'bout two years ago?" and again he became mirthful.

"You cert'n'y have been flirtin' shameful with Pussy Huggins, Horace. Ef I wuz th' other gyrls I wouldn't speak tuh you tuh save yo' neck."

"Well, you couldn' be but one other gyrl!" cried Buzzy, jovially. "Though there *is* enough or yuh tuh make two, Aunt Looly! Hyah! hyah!"

He then turned to Barbara:

"Say, Mr. What's-his-name, yo' friend's run off with my mash. It's jess 'bout fyar *you* should come 'long with me, don'cher think? Less have a polka."

Barbara was protesting, and Buzzy endeavoring to put his long arm about her waist, when she saw Dering approaching with an expression of condensed fury about his lowered brows. He said good-night to Mrs. Twampler with an abruptness which astonished that kind soul, and, bearing the drowsy Miss Fridiswig off on his other elbow from her nook by the fire, placed both ladies in the carriage before they were quite aware of what had happened. "I'm cold! I've left my mantilla up-stairs!" whimpered Miss Fridiswig, shivering. "How very impetuous Mr. Dering always is, Barbara!"

"Yes, it's certainly rather chilly," assented her niece, who was laughing weakly.

Dering, who had dashed off when Miss Cabell began speaking, now returned with an armful of wraps, in which he proceeded to enfold his companions. Miss Fridiswig struggled bravely to get her mantilla adjusted properly to her little figure, but Barbara submitted with entire meekness to having her long cloak thrown about her upside down and its sleeves crossed upon her lap. This feat accomplished, Dering arranged his silk muffler fiercely about his throat, drew on a pair of fur-lined gloves, and flung himself into the carriage beside Barbara.

"I suppose I need not apologize," he said behind his teeth, as they drove off. "I suppose you have had enough *fun* at that delightful entertainment. By gad! my coat smells yet of that Huggins creature's patchouli! I'm glad you find it so amusing, Barbara. I fancy you won't mind my smoking until you've thoroughly indulged your inclination for mirth. A good cigar will be better than this stench, at all events!"

He lighted a cigar with savage energy, and, drawing the rugs about him, settled himself grimly in one corner.

"I suppose it will add to your amusement to know that I've caught a cold into the bargain!" he announced, before relapsing into final silence.

"If you have pneumonia, I promise to come and nurse you," said Barbara, with soft seriousness.

"Umph!" returned Dering, grumpily.

V.

After a while Barbara stood up and put on the cloak, which Dering had only tucked about her shoulders. Miss Fridiswig had drawn her tiny heelless slippers up on the seat, and was napping comfortably, with her head on her huge old-fashioned muff.

"Does this smoke bother you? Shall I throw away my cigar?" asked Dering, suddenly.

"Oh, no," she answered; "I don't mind it at all, and Aunt Fridis is asleep."

"I'm going to throw it away, at any rate," he said, finally.

The horses were walking slowly up a steep hill, and the branches of some shrubs brushed softly against the sides of the carriage.

"Are you very tired, Barbara?" he asked again after some moments.

"A little. It's rather pleasant."

"Why in the name of common sense did you drag me and yourself to this ridiculous thing?"

"I—sometimes they are very amusing. You were very funny with Miss Huggins."

"Oh, I dare say."

"But I am glad you saved me from Buzzy."

"Impudent jackanapes!"

"Is Miss Huggins as beautiful a 'darncer' as Mrs. Twampler said?"

"Ugh! What an awful thing she was to touch! And how abominably she smelt! If there's anything I loathe, it's patchouli. Are you comfortable?"

"Yes, thank you."

He leaned forward to draw the wrap more securely

about her, and his hand touched hers. He let his fingers rest where they were, and her hand, though it quivered a little, was not withdrawn. In the silence that followed they descended another hill and crossed a stream.

"What a cool night for this season!" she said, under her breath.

"Yes, awfully," replied Dering. He had her hand in both his now, her lithe arm lay lightly along his sleeve. She had turned her head, as though looking at the brown fields without.

There was something about him that dominated and mastered her as of old, though her soul was not at peace, and she felt uncertain as to the road that she was to follow.

She sat quite motionless. His touch was like an elixir of life flowing through her veins, which had so long been numb. At least one would live in the presence of this man. Existence would not be the mere consciousness which it was under ordinary circumstances.

He leaned a little towards her, and half involuntarily she made a motion of agreement. Their cheeks were very near together. Presently they touched, but still no word was spoken. She felt his face turning slowly until his lips rested on the delicate curve just below her ear.

"How your heart is beating!" he whispered.

"Yes, I know."

"Barbara."

"Hush! Don't. She will hear you."

"Faugh! She is sound as a tabby."

"She may be pretending."

"How you dote on teasing me!—eh? But I know

you. Give me your hand, I say. The other! There, now! Come to me again."

"I cannot! I cannot! Don't ask me. Oh, why is it so sweet?"

"Because it is meant to be,—because you must yield to it. Darling, why can't you just give yourself to me without all this fuss? We could be married so easily. There, I've startled you now. You'd be off like a shot if you could. Come, Barbara; come, my beauty! Let me take you and make you happy. I could."

"Yes,—I—I think that."

"Then stop struggling. Tell me you will marry me. Never mind haunting thoughts, only be my wife, and I will exorcise them. Never fear."

Barbara's pulses were vibrating wildly. She was confused by crowding thoughts. At last one stood out clear, definite. She owed this man a reparation for the way she had treated him in the past. The old morbidness was gone. She could not add to or take away from her dead husband's happiness. Besides, for Dering she felt a love new, different, but very powerful. Life without him seemed to hold nothing but loneliness. With him she might accomplish many things which now appeared impossible. He felt that she was wavering and pressed her close against his side.

"There is only one end of it for us both, Barbara. Why do you take such delight in drawing out the agony? Why not give in? You'll have to. You can't send me away a second time. What a preposterous ass I was to listen to you! I ought to have turned back at the lawn gate. I know you would have given your little finger to call me from the window. Why don't you answer? Oh, my dear witch, have I seen

into your heart? *Did* you call me, Barbara? *Did* you write me a letter next morning and tear it up? You *did!* You are blushing. I can feel your cheek grow hot against mine. You have loved me through it all! Eh, enchantress? As I've loved you in spite of my rage? For, gad! I *was* furious with you. Your talons drew blood, my dear. I thought I hated you for a long time, but afterwards I couldn't get away from you. I swore I'd never see you again, and then I took a steamer from Liverpool. Then, when I landed in New York, I swore I'd never cross Mason and Dixon's line, and the next day I found myself here! What a rat-a-plan the dear heart keeps up! You look like a great snow-queen in this dim light, with gems for eyes. Your eyes stir me, Barbara. What is it that I see in them?"

Barbara seemed to be gazing at her own rapid thoughts, whirling as in circles of fire against her closed lids. She heard herself saying in a broken whisper,—

"Do you think I could make you happy? Do you think you would not get out of patience with me? I have changed. I am more reasonable, but still I am different. You would have to be very patient. Please let me go. I can't think so close to you."

Dering gave a low laugh of exultation and released her. She leaned back, covering her face with her hands. What would be their future spent together? How would it really seem to be the wife of this man, who looked at her with Val's eyes, yet without his gentleness?—who spoke to her with Val's voice, yet without his tenderness?—who fascinated her, conquered her, and yet so often failed to comprehend her? She had suffered so intensely. What she craved was rest

in love. Would Dering really give her this? Would he be patient? Would he never feel angry and incensed against her when their moods happened to clash? She sat erect suddenly, with a sharp indrawn breath.

"What is it? What is the matter?" asked Dering, quickly.

"Suppose I were to marry you and you were to get angry with me? I could not bear it. It would kill me."

"My own dear, as if I could muster up a vexed feeling against you!"

"But you said you had. You said you had been furious with me. I'd rather die than have that."

"Now, Barbara," said Dering in a rather hopeless voice, "are you really going to drum up such feeble, threadbare objections now that all the others have been done away with? I must say it's rather rough."

"I must say what I feel," she returned, desperately. "I must say everything that's in my heart, because this time it is final."

"Well, I should say," remarked Dering, with grimness.

"It's final, of course," she went on, getting a little excited; "and I must be sure,—you must be sure."

"I'm sure enough. Pray don't bother about me," he replied, laughing again. "I really can't have you wasting force on that score."

"Well, then, I must be sure for you. Suppose I disappointed you dreadfully. Suppose I couldn't make you happy. Suppose you found that I didn't love you as—as you expect to be loved." She paused, and her brilliant eyes regarded him anxiously. He nodded reassuringly at her over his calmly-folded arms.

"I'll attend to those matters if you are sure of yourself. That's all I ask. Your love quite satisfies me, if that will be any help to you in coming to a decision."

"I want more than anything else to make you happy," faltered Barbara. "I have been very wretched over my cruelty to you."

"Oh, well. I was dreadfully impatient," he admitted, easily. "I ought to have given you more line. Fishing you is like fishing a salmon,—you need lots of line and time. I am being patient enough now. Don't you think so?"

"Yes. You are very good to me," she replied, somewhat absent-mindedly.

To herself she was saying over and over, "Could I give him up again?" It seemed to her it would be like tearing off an arm to put Dering from her a second time. Then why did she not find rest and peace in the thought of marrying him, now that her feverish and unnatural fancies about Val had all vanished? Surely he would wish her to secure such happiness and comfort as remained to her in this life. It was not any thought of Val that disturbed her at this vital moment. She was possessed rather by a vague and half-realized dread, which trickled in bitter drops through the delicious, gushing draught of unexpected love and sympathy. Why was there not more satisfaction in her feeling for Dering? Why could she not give herself to him at once, and with that sense of completion, of withholding nothing which makes the purest ecstasy of love?

"Well," he asked, suddenly, "are you asleep, Barbara?"

"No," she said. "I've been thinking."

"Does it take such a tremendous effort to make up your mind? How flattering!"

She moved uneasily, again covering her face with her hands, but did not answer.

Afterwards she felt Dering's arm about her, and, almost in spite of herself, her tense figure relaxed in his steady embrace. Little by little her head sank down upon his shoulder. She was very tired. There was no passion in her feeling for him then. It was one half of gratitude, half of willing submission. He desired to dominate, to conquer her. She was anxious, almost eager, to yield. They sat thus, silently clasping each other, until the carriage drew up before the door of Rosemary.

VI.

The hall-clock was striking eleven when they entered, so she asked him to come into the music-room and have a cup of tea before going away. Miss Fridiswig curled up sleepily in a large chair before the drawing-room fire, and said that she would wait for them there. In her drowsy mind she was feebly conscious of thinking some such words as these: "I do hope, if Barbara is going to marry that Mr. Dering, she'll do it pretty soon. It ruins my digestion sitting up as late as this. I don't see why she potters so about it. It's exactly like my new pepper-and-salt berége. It's new, but no one can tell it from the old one. I can't see any difference myself, except, perhaps, it cuts a little under the arms. He is so exactly like Valentine. I really think that it's sheer perversity that makes her hesitate. I'm sure he is very good to

come back after she had treated him so abominably. Dear! dear! how sleepy I am! and I suppose he won't think of leaving before twelve."

The two others, in the meantime, had reached the music-room, and Dering, in his evening-dress, made a rather incongruous figure as he arranged the fire, carrying great hickory logs from the wood-box under the window-seat to the tiled hearth. Barbara, in her place behind the huge, old-fashioned silver urn with its dented coat of arms, could not help smiling as she watched him.

"I am as bad as a boy about liking a big blaze," he said, coming towards her. "Oh, my dearest girl, *isn't* this comfy?"

Barbara had a sudden rush of spontaneousness. She bent her face backward with a gleeful little laugh of pleasure and pressed her soft crown of hair against his breast. Dering was sometimes very wise. His response to this movement was a gentle hand laid lightly against the curved throat, while, with the other, he tilted the now boiling water from the urn into the empty cups. Even the kitten, which approached with an exuberant purr, was kindly greeted. He stooped, and, lifting it by the nape of its sleek neck, placed it on the arm of the big chair beside Barbara.

"Why, I am happy! I am happy!" Barbara was telling herself, in utter astonishment. "How dear he is! how kind! how companionable!"

The shadowy dread which had beset her during their drive home had entirely gone. She felt that she could trust herself to him with a feeling of perfect peace.

"How prettily you drink!" exclaimed Dering, suddenly. "Oh, sweetheart, is there anything you don't

give a charm to? Even your faults are bewitching. I could not part with one thing about you. My dear lily, the little freckles make you all the lovelier."

Barbara stooped with a swift movement and kissed his hand as it held her teacup and saucer.

"Don't! you'll make me break the cup," he exclaimed. "Oh, Barbara, Barbara, Barbara, *is* this heaven, or is it not?"

"I love you," she returned, trembling, and almost in a whisper. "I love you, Jock; we are going to be happy, after all! I cannot realize it. Tell me it is true. Tell me that you believe it."

"Believe it!" cried Dering. He set the things that he was holding upon the tray, and turning, took her into his arms. "Do you belong to me?" he asked, in a deep breath. "Is it for always?"

"Yes, for always! I swear it!" she answered, under a sudden conviction. "I will never change again. You can trust me absolutely this time."

"Can I?" he asked, holding her closer and closer until it was painful. But of this she gave no sign, only nodded in reply to his ardent whisper. "You do swear it?"

"Yes, yes," she said, turning her head eagerly from side to side, as though looking for something. "Let me go for a minute," she went on. Darting over to a table, she returned with a book in her hand. "It is a Bible," she told him, putting it into his hand and keeping her own upon it. "I will swear to you on this that I will never change."

"That you will marry me?"

"Yes."

"And soon?"

"Yes."

"In a month?"

She dropped her eyes for a moment and her strong lip wavered. Then she answered, in the same still voice,—

"Yes."

He drew the Bible gently from under her fingers and placed it on a chair. Then he put his arms about her, holding her in a throbbing silence which had something solemn in it. He did not attempt to kiss her. With her forehead bent forward upon his breast she stood quiet, waiting for him to speak or move.

At last he said,—

"If you should by any chance fail me this time, you'd do me a mortal injury."

"What can I say?" she said, desperately, her face quivering. Then suddenly a brilliant look flowed into her brown eyes.

She drew a little away from him and began to pull eagerly at her wedding-ring. It came off in her hand with a leap, and she turned and thrust it out to him.

"There! I give you that! Is that proof enough?" Dering gazed steadily into her eyes with a powerful look of determination.

"Come with me," he said, finally. She leant willingly upon him and they walked over to the fire together.

"Here," he said, putting the ring into her fingers, "throw that into those hottest coals there."

She did so without flinching.

"Now!" he cried, and, turning, they kissed each other with mutual ardor.

VII.

Barbara and Dering had been married two weeks. She was still very shy with him, and the fact of signing her name "Barbara Dering" still sent a sharp pang through her, as though she were driving a needle into some helpless creature.

As regarded her husband, she had sometimes a fleeting sensation of being slightly apart from him in certain mental questions, while Dering had discovered that a very impassioned woman may also be supremely spiritual. Although neither admitted it, even to themselves, they were beginning to jar a little on each other in those trivial nothings which make the all of married life.

Dering's manner often caused Barbara to wince, while some of her ideas and objections struck him as weak and sentimental. Still, this slight coolness that blew across their intense feeling, from time to time, was no more serious in its effects than the chill of an early autumn day, which is only unpleasant as long as one remains in the shadows. In moods of sunshine the two were as near and dear to each other as before their marriage.

One day after their return to Rosemary, Dering, coming in from a long ride, found Barbara at the library window with a book in her hands. He slipped behind her and began to read over her shoulder. It was an unmeasured delight to feel her heart quicken its beats under his touch and to see the bright color leap along her throat.

"What are you reading?" he said at last, referring to the Poems of Rossetti which she held.

"This one, 'Her Love,'" she answered. "It is so exquisite. Men so seldom really understand women. I love to find a poem like this, written by a man."

"Let's see," said Dering. "I don't know his poems at all." So they read together the sonnet in question. It was this:

"HER LOVE.

She loves him; for her infinite soul is Love,
And he her load-star. Passion in her is
A glass facing his fire, where the bright bliss
Is mirrored and the heat returned. Yet move
That glass, a stranger's amorous flame to prove,
And it shall turn, by instant contraries,
Ice to the moon; while her pure fire to his
For whom it burns clings close i' the heart's alcove.
Lo! they are one. With wifely breast to breast,
And circling arms, she welcomes all command
Of love,—her soul to answering ardors fanned.
Yet, as morn springs or twilight sinks to rest,
Ah! who shall say she deems not loveliest
The hour of sisterly sweet hand in hand?"

Her back was to him, so that she did not see the smile of frank amusement which disclosed his bright teeth, but something in his tone stung her as he said, laughing,—

"By gad! he *did* make her out rather a molly-coddle in the end! I don't think we ever tried the—what is it? Let me see again. Oh, yes, 'the sisterly sweet hand in hand.' Did we?"

"I don't think you exactly comprehend what Rossetti means," she answered, a little coldly. "He doesn't mean sawny sentimentalism like that of two country bumpkins at a fair. He is trying to express that

deep undertone of mutual understanding and rest and bliss that perfect love brings. I suppose it was rather daring to try to describe it. Any one knows what you mean when you try to express passionate love, but even when poets attempt to put into words that spiritual essence of love which is not mere affection, or companionship, or—or anything else that is generally known, it is like trying to describe a subtle harmony to some one who has never heard it."

"What eloquence!" said Dering, rather nettled in his turn. "Do you really mean to say that you'd rather hold my hand than have me kiss you?"

"I think one has different moods," she returned, hesitatingly.

"But, good Lord! that Rossetti fellow says the woman in his sonnet prefers it; or if he doesn't say it, he hints it. Let's see it again."

"No, don't," said Barbara, rather unkindly. "Let's put it back in the bookcase and forget that it was ever written. Did you have a pleasant ride?"

Dering looked at her with obstinate lips.

"Do you really fancy, my dear girl, that I'm going to be brushed aside like that? I want you to be so very kind as to come over here to the sofa and explain just what you understand by that rather astonishing statement."

"Oh, dear, dear!" sighed Barbara, "I'm sure I don't know exactly what it does mean now. I'm completely mixed up."

"Well, come over here and I'll help you unravel a thought or two. *Come!*" rather peremptorily, as she hesitated.

"I don't like it at all, Jock, when you speak to me in that tone," she said, flushing. "I am perfectly willing

to do what you ask, but I am certainly not going to run at your bidding like a good little girl."

"Why, positively, you're cross about it, Barbara! I didn't think you'd make such a fuss over a little thing."

"It's not I," she said, her eyes beginning to flash. "I'm sure I would have let it drop at first. It was you who would discuss. Besides, it isn't a little thing either. It's a vital question, and one that I find we disagree upon."

"By Jove! we *do* disagree, if you mean to say that you prefer feeling a sort of mawkish friendship for me to what I thought was a fiery love. After all, I suppose women *are* all more or less alike."

"Who am I more or less alike?" asked Barbara, with tartness. "Whom are you classing me with?"

"I don't like your tone any more than you liked mine just now," he retorted, curtly, and rising, moved over to the window with his hands in his pockets and his lips pursed as though to whistle.

"I beg your pardon," said Barbara, feeling a wild and undignified desire to cry. She took up a book which lay on the table and made an elaborate pretence of reading. Then, all at once, something stirred in her heart. She felt that she had been sharp and hasty, and that, although he had hurt her more than he knew by laughing at words which seemed to her to express her inmost soul, she had been wrong to visit such an unintentional thing upon him. If some of their opinions already made a slight barrier between them, was she not very wrong and unwise to risk increasing it by any show of resentment? She threw down the book, and rushing over to his side, with one of her eager movements slipped her arms about his throat and drew

down his head to hers. Dering's neck bent a little stiffly under her strong clasp.

"My love! I *am* so sorry!" she whispered. "I was very, very, abominably, hideously cross, and you can punish me in any way that you like." Still Dering's eyes remained distinctly cold.

"I shouldn't mind your having been cross," he said, "if I could get at my offence. I can't make out what I said to put you in such a rage."

"You couldn't call it a rage, Jock," Barbara returned, also cold again. "It isn't very just of you to say that I was in a rage."

"Oh, well, hang it all!" he exclaimed, impatiently, "for goodness' sake don't let us go on splitting hairs in this childish fashion! Call it righteous wrath, or just indignation, or whatever you will. I never saw you disagreeable like that before, and it makes a mighty big change in you, I can tell you that."

"Oh!" said Barbara, turning away with a pale face.

"You've shown yourself ill-natured and unkind," Dering fumed on. "And if I were inclined to be rude I might add silly. Where are you going?" he broke off. "I'll be very obliged if you'll pay me the ordinary respect of remaining until I've finished speaking."

"I'd rather not," answered Barbara, quietly. "I think we should both be sorry afterwards if I were to stay."

"Well, look here," said Dering, frowning, "I demand it of you, no matter what you think. I'm not used to having women treat me as mammas treat naughty school-boys."

"I'm not used to being spoken to in this way either," said Barbara. Her eyes had grown black and her face looked dangerous with its white, compressed lips and dilated nostrils. "What cause did I ever give you

to think me a meek Griselda who could be ordered about at will?"

"Come back!" thundered Dering.

Barbara smiled and went out, closing the door softly.

VIII.

Barbara, having locked her door, stood in the centre of her bedroom and looked about her with a dazed air. Then, as the consciousness of what had passed between herself and Dering grew upon her, she threw herself down upon the floor and buried her face in her folded arms. At first no tears would come, but presently she began to feel herself shaken by short sobs, which she controlled in a moment or two by a great effort.

"I won't! I won't!" she kept saying, in a soft voice. "He shall not make me cry! I will not let him make me cry!" Then she sat up and pushed back her heavy hair. "How dreadful!" she murmured. "I almost dislike him! It frightens me!"

With a sudden, sickening swoop, the thought of Valentine's gentleness came down upon her. She hid her face again and uttered some desperate words of prayer. She felt sure that God would not let this awful torture remain. And presently, as she knelt waiting, the vividness of the present came to her relief.

"He is my husband! I *do* love him!" she whispered, with a great gush of tears. "But how harsh he was! How cruel! I can't realize that he really spoke to me like that. Oh, what a bitter world!"

She rose and went to the window, gazing sadly out

at the dark box-bushes, against which showed a yellow lace-work of autumn leaves. The sun had nearly sunk behind the violet-gray of the far hills. Slanting beams struck across the withering grass on the wide lawn and touched the rose-gray seed-pods on a magnolia-tree near the window, making the half-disclosed scarlet beans shine like jewels. A rabbit came jumping suddenly towards her, then swerved to one side and disappeared among the shrubbery. Overhead, two crows flew slowly, with social cawings, their bodies showing a rusty black in the gold light.

There was a sadness through it all, and Barbara pressed her hands together with a long catching breath.

"What a poor, poor blind fool I was to think that happiness could come twice in one life! I was wrong just now; but he made me so indignant. It has always made me wicked to be taunted and ordered about. I would have done anything he wished if he had only been gentle. Oh, me! how hard it all is! I know I was very, very wrong, but I did say I was sorry, and he met me with such coldness. It makes my cheeks burn to think of it. How terrible the intimacy of marriage is unless it goes with absolute tenderness, and, oh, how he always laughs at that word! Oh, he doesn't understand! He doesn't understand!" she ended, beginning to cry heart-brokenly and sinking on the floor by the window.

"And I am afraid he will never let me teach him,—that he doesn't care to learn! There seems to be only one side to his love for me. If one could see the meaning in it all sometimes! There is one thing at least. I am learning that I need a great, great deal of discipline. I have such a craving for happiness. It is wrong, I think. I care much more for other people

than I used to do; but how obstinate I am! When I think of how he looked at me just now, I feel so defiant, so insolent! I feel as though I should only taunt him and aggravate him if he came to ask my pardon. I——"

A half-hesitating knock at the door made her start.

"It's Jock, Barbara," said a low voice from without.

The blood rushed into her face, and she sat where she was, quite silent, her hands gripped together, her lips just curved with a revengeful little smile. At the moment she felt hard and cruel and as though he were, in some sort, her enemy.

"Barbara," said Dering again. Still she was silent.

After a moment or two he turned away, and she heard his footsteps going from her along the uncarpeted floor of the hall.

"He treated me insolently," she said, with her teeth fast shut. "No man shall speak to me like that." And she remained in the gathering twilight, her heart growing more and more desolate and bitter, her body beginning to shiver as the fire died out on the hearth.

All at once some one flung up one of the windows with a bang, and she looked up to see Dering leap into the room from the top of the portico outside.

She got to her feet and stood facing him with defiant eyes, but he came and crushed her in his arms as though she had been a wilful child, and began a bewildered outpour of regret, apology, repentance, reproach, love.

"You cruel, cruel, beautiful, wicked, devilish darling!" he ended finally, and Barbara began to laugh in spite of herself. "If you haven't the knack of torturing a man out of his wits down to a fine point! First you go and tell me that you agree with a blood-

less numskull who says that holding hands forms the sum of human bliss! Then you follow it up by telling me you don't agree with me on a vital question! Then you treat me with the coolest insolence, and walk off in the middle of what I am saying to you, shutting the door in my face! Aren't you ashamed, honestly?"

"Yes, I am," she said, her face roguish in one of the flashing changes which gave her her potent charm. "I told you so; but you were too odious!"

"Yes, I know I was," he admitted. "I haven't a very nice temper."

"Indeed you haven't! No one ever spoke to me so in all my life. Do you know there was one minute when I almost hated you!"

"I felt something rather like it for you," he returned, laughing.

"But you *did* begin it, Jock! I'm sure you'll be just about that. I didn't want to discuss it from the first. Now, did I?"

"That's just what provoked me. You've such a grandiose way of waving aside any one who does not agree with you exactly."

"Oh, Jock! what a horrid picture you make of me!"

"Well," said Dering, dragging at his moustache and assuming a grave, rather judicial air, "you *have* some faults that you're not at all aware of. That's one of 'em."

"I don't see why you waited until now to tell me about it," she answered, stiffly, her head, with its ruffled, flame-like hair, very erect. "I must confess I like people to speak out frankly at the time; not go on for months laying things up as it were."

"I'm speaking frankly now, and you don't seem to like it much."

"That's not the question at all. Why didn't you speak at first?"

"Well, you see, my dear girl, I had such an awfully hard time getting you to marry me at all that I certainly wasn't going to risk my chances by setting up as a mentor."

"Can you think of anything else that displeases you about me just now?" asked Barbara, quietly, but with a feeling of angry protestation swelling in her heart.

In married life the first occasion of fault-finding is an event from which conjugal dates are evolved. Barbara remembered that this was the twenty-second of October, and was, moreover, sure that she would never forget it.

"Can you?" she repeated, as Dering stood silent, still pulling at his moustache.

"Yes, I can," he answered at last, rather abruptly. "But I'm not such an ass as to mention it. I've fussed you up enough for one day."

"I'm not in the least fussed up, as you call it," said Barbara, icily; "and I would much rather have all the charges against me mentioned at once."

"Oh," exclaimed Dering, exasperated, "who the mischief spoke of 'charges against you'? Do you really fancy yourself faultless? By Jove! you *have* been shamefully spoiled and flattered! It's a wonder you are as simple and natural as you are."

"Thank you," said Barbara.

He wheeled about suddenly. "I tell you what it is," he remarked, energetically, "we're both acting like idiots to stay here squabbling in this barn of a room. I'm catching cold this minute. I can always tell. What on earth possessed you to let the fire go out?"

"There's the bell," said Barbara. "If you ring twice, Martha Ellen will come and make a fire."

"*Martha Ellen!*" jerked Dering, with an angry laugh. "Why on earth do most negro girls have these double-barrelled names? Why don't you call her Martha or Ellen?"

"You can, if you choose," said Barbara, dryly. "She will answer to almost anything. My name for her is Rameses. Perhaps you would like that better."

"Jove!" exclaimed Dering, with another laugh, "you *can* make yourself unpleasant. I'm sorry I should have had to mention one of your failings to you, but, as your husband, I don't choose to be made ridiculous in the eyes of the world by the absurd childishness you sometimes indulge in."

Barbara rose, and, going to the dressing-table, lifted one of the big ivory brushes and began to smooth her disarranged hair with hands that trembled. Then she looked at him in the glass until their eyes met, when she said, in a cold, quiet voice,—

"I shall not forget what you have said to me."

"No; it's my wish that you should not," he returned, staring back at her with hard eyes, which she wondered how she could ever have thought handsome.

"It's seven o'clock," she then said, glancing down at the little Louis Quinze watch of old red enamel which lay on the pin-cushion. "If you'll be so kind as to go, I should like to dress for dinner."

"All right," he said, rising at once. "Only I hope you won't dawdle as much as usual. The soup is always cold, and this country cooking is beastly at the best."

"I shall be punctual," said Barbara, and he closed the door rather noisily and went off, whistling "Wait till the Clouds roll by, Jenny," with elaborate flourishes.

IX.

Barbara, left to herself, turned around, with hands clinched at her sides and furious eyes fastened on the shut door.

"I hate him! I hate him!" she said, in a voice low but of condensed energy. "I hate you!" she repeated, as though addressing some one before her. Then she gazed about her, as though in search of some relief. A little square yellow stain on one of the walls near the fireplace caught her attention. It was evidently the mark made by a picture which had hung there a long time. She ran over and laid her cheek against it. "Oh, Val!" she said, with a deep sob. Then turning quickly away, took her forehead between both palms and pressed it hard, whispering to herself, "No, I must not do that. I shall go mad if I begin that."

She threw herself on the sofa presently, feeling all of a sudden weak and cold. In the confused whirl of emotions which beset her she could not single out that which was strongest. Her mind seemed to be a tangled and fiery web of new fierce thoughts which frightened her. She gave herself up to the clutch of what she considered despair with that sense of the finalness of things which so often misleads the newly married. It was impossible that she could ever again feel love for a being whom she had once allowed herself to hate. It was impossible that one who really loved her should speak to her as Dering had spoken this afternoon. The old familiar rustling in the boughs of an elm near her window struck her as derisive. She seemed to be some one else, and the objects in the room had to her an air of disapproval. Then, in her

bewildered brain, she tried to go back over what they had said to each other and to see where she had been wrong, but before she could remember anything consecutively, Dering's last words struck her memory's ear like a blow and set every nerve tingling with angry denial.

"He does not chose that I—*I* shall make him ridiculous in the eyes of the world! Oh, what words, what words to speak to a woman! And we have only been married two weeks!"

That vague, dark terror that she remembered came down upon her. "My God, what is our life going to be?" she said aloud in a childlike tone of great fear. She felt her throat beginning to ache and the pressure of coming tears behind her eyes, then started up and began to unhook her morning gown and to look nervously into different drawers and closets for the dress that she wanted. She would not ring for Rameses. She could not bear the thought of even the most loving eyes watching her through this grim hour. As she drew the last fold into place the gong sounded for dinner, and she turned to leave the room, but coming back, fell upon her knees for a moment.

"Don't, don't make it too hard! I will try to bear it," was somehow all that she could find to say, and in reply she seemed to hear these stern words repeated in a voice of cold severity: "I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love."

She almost ran from the room, driven by a dread sense of friendlessness and isolation. In some strange way the very silence seemed urging upon her the truth of Dering's criticisms.

"Perhaps it is so,—perhaps I am all that he says," she thought, pausing on her way down-stairs to grasp

the railing of the banisters with a terror-stricken look, as though she had met some spectre coming up. Then she heard Miss Fridiswig's little feet pattering through the hall, and ran down to join her. Dering was standing before the dining-room fire in evening dress as they entered. His face had a frozen, stolid look, as though carved in metal. Looking at Barbara, he saw only that she was very pale and that her lips and eyebrows were haughty. His thoughts of her had not been gentle. He was a man of quick, imperious temper, not accustomed either to opposition or to the ways of women. Pride and resolution were probably his strongest characteristics, and Barbara had wounded the first and roused the second. He liked to impress his individuality upon others, and he was determined that Barbara should conform to his ideas in a general sense, if not in detail.

Their discussion over Rossetti's sonnet had left him smarting in two ways. First, her tacit criticism upon his comprehension of love had angered his vanity, and, secondly, the mere idea that her keen passion for him was waning into a poetic sentimentality gripped him with that spasmodic kind of pain which brings with it a savage irritation. He felt that she loved him when it harmonized with her mood, and that when he opposed her she could instantly call up the icy irony of manner which had so galled him during the past interview.

At the same time, with a strange, vehement undercurrent of feeling which swept his thoughts in an opposite direction, he was conscious that her exquisite femininess and beauty roused in him an intense adoration, and that in hurting her he was forcing upon himself throes of bitter pain. In addition to all this he was haunted by the memory of her wild fluctuations, uncertain

humors, frankly cruel egoism, throughout their first engagement. He felt that he was dealing with a powerful and incalculable force, and that he had no certainty as to whether her love for him would remain steadfast under trying circumstances. This doubt, however, was soothed by his firm belief in his own mastery of the situation and strength to compel events into the order which he wished them to assume. Upon one thing he was absolutely determined: Barbara should acknowledge that in him she had found her conqueror. In his secret mind he considered that his cousin Valentine Pomfret had been a rather weak and unavailing fellow, and he was given to saying that he detested chaps who went about as though they had springs in their backs and moved by electric shocks; this being Dering's method of expressing his dislike for the usual drawing-room manner of this century.

He watched Barbara furtively during dinner. Every motion of her large, fair hands, every turn of her supple throat under its clear and elastic skin, every flicker of her straight brows and dark-red lips, thrilled him with that sense of supreme personality which the being we love holds for us even in lapses of indignation. To him she appeared self-satisfied, indifferent, cool, while in reality her heart dragged heavily like a sick thing in her breast, and the food which she was eating seemed to have no taste.

"It is all over," she was saying to herself. "I have married him and I dislike him. It was an illusion, a fascination. He is cruel and cold-hearted. Every fibre of me loathes him to-night."

She went up-stairs very early, threw herself into the wide bed, and slept heavily like a child after a long fit of sobbing.

X.

When Barbara woke the next morning she was astonished to find that her mood had changed during the night, and that her anger against Dering had died down into a feeling of isolated hopelessness and grief. She heard him moving about in his dressing-room, and the snapping of a newly-kindled fire told her that he had just got up. She felt that she was very weak, because of a strong yearning which tempted her to put her lips against the crack of the door which separated their rooms and bid him good-morning.

"I seem to have no strength of purpose," she told herself, tossing about impatiently, while Rameses flung open the Venetian blinds, letting in a twinkling sluice of October sunlight, and filled her tub with water, which gave forth an icy crackle as it gushed into the hollow of zinc. While she waited for these preparations to be made she read in one of those little books of which women are so fond. It was called "Daily Strength for Daily Needs," and the title had been a source of great amusement to Dering, who found it unique. She turned to the page dated October the twenty-third. There was a verse from the Psalms, a bit of Lucy Larcom's poetry, and two selections, one from George Eliot and one from Frederick Robertson. The extract from "Romola" was as follows:

"*You are seeking your own will, my daughter. You are seeking some good other than the law you are bound to obey. But how will you find good? It is not a thing of choice. It is a river that flows from the foot of the Invisible Throne, and flows by the path of obedience. I say*

again, man cannot choose his duties. You may choose to forsake your duties, and choose not to have the sorrow they bring. But you will go forth, and what will you find, my daughter? Sorrow without duty, bitter herbs and no bread with them."

Barbara lay quite still after reading this, her hand thrust deep into the loosened masses of her hair, her eyes upon the golden flutter of the leaves against the dark-blue atmosphere, shrouding the great evergreens beyond.

"Yes, it is my duty," she said finally, in a firm voice. "How hard it seems to be for me to learn things! I don't want to be wrong and wicked, and yet, somehow, I am always stumbling into such burning mistakes!"

She turned absently to the next page, and saw this extract from Mrs. Stowe's writings:

"*Talk of hair-cloth shirts and scourgings and sleeping on ashes as means of saintship! There is no need of them in our country. Let a woman once look at her domestic trials as her hair-cloth, her ashes, her scourges, accept them, rejoice in them, smile and be quiet, silent, patient, loving under them, and the convent can teach her no more. She is a victorious saint.*"

Barbara dashed from the bed with a gay laugh. "Ramie!" she exclaimed, seizing the smiling little negress by both arms,—"Ramie, dear, I'm going to be a victorious saint!"

"Well, you cert'n'y is pretty, I don' keer what else you is," answered Martha Ellen, drawing her delicately-formed, rough little hand, with a loving gesture, over her mistress's brilliant hair.

"*Dear* Ramie! I'm going to be 'pretty is as pretty does.' That's much better. Does Tobit ever make you feel like being 'ugly is as ugly does,' Ramie?"

"Tobit's mighty aggravatin' sometimes, Miss Barb'ra. I kin sca'cely hole my han's."

"How is he aggravating? Is he cross to you?"

"No, that's jes' hit. I *cyarn*' make him cross, I done keer *what* I do. He's jes' ez kine en good! They nuver *wuz* sech a man 'bout bein' good in sickness."

"Well, that *is* nice, Ramie! I'm going to give him a watch at Christmas." Martha Ellen sank down on the hearth-rug under the weight of her emotion.

"Miss Barb'ra, ef you give Tobit a watch, Tobit 'll bust!"

"Are you *sure* you wouldn't *like* him to 'bust,' Ramie?" asked Barbara, wickedly. Rameses shook her head in solemn denial.

"I is ben think all sorts uv things, Miss Barb'ra, but you does git so mixed up. An' hit cert'n'y does seem as how dee Lord does favor de men-folks. Sometimes, when Tobit have stay out so late at night, I is ben sit down en plead wid dee Lord tuh let hit thunder an' lighten', 'cause Tobit's *awful* 'fraid uv thunder, an' I 'clare tuh gracious, Miss Barb'ra, sometimes he ain't ben put he foot in dee house two seckints 'fore hit pour down wid rain like buckets wuz bein' upsetted. But hit don' *nuver* begin till he safe in-doors."

"What a shame!" exclaimed Barbara, with the ready sympathy which made her servants give her such unstinted adoration. They had all been happy slaves and born on the estate, or else the children of such slaves, and they treated their young mistress more like a beloved child or a superior sister than a person apart from them, holding a distant authority.

"Husban's is *somethin'*, that's shore!" sighed Rameses, drawing a long blue silk stocking over her arm and turning the foot that Barbara might slip it on more

easily. "You cert'n'y *wuz* brave tuh try hit two times, Miss Barb'ra."

"Yes, I think I was, Ramie; but then you never know what you'll do until you do it. I suppose you think if Tobit was to—to disappear you'd never marry again?"

"No, honey-chile," said Rameses, solemnly. "Martha Ellen don' *think* nothin' 'bout that. She know, ef God wuz tuh lif' her outer trouble onct, she cert'n'y w'an't goin' tuh put her paws in no other trap menfolks could set for her."

"So you think marriage is a failure, Ramie?"

"I dunno 'bout others, Miss Barb'ra," said the little woman, shrewdly; "hit cert'n'y is ben fail fuh me."

After Barbara had put on her gown of creamy serge and arranged her hair in sleek compactness, she looked as fresh and pure as some white bird just out of its dip in a morning pool. Her face was no longer pale and wretched as on the night before, but in her eyes and about her lips was a look of alert determination that grew as she searched among the trifles on her writing-table for pen, paper, and sealing-wax. After settling everything to her liking she sat down, and bending low above the sheet in front of her, as though afraid that some one might peep over her shoulder, wrote the following note to Dering:

"Dear,—I feel that I have been wrong and have wounded you, and I do want to make friends again. I can't say more than that I'm sorry. Can I, my Jock o' hazel e'en? (*Don't* think I've made a mistake here in writing *e'en* instead of *dean!!!* It is meant for a pun!) I mean to be the goodest girl in the world from this day on, though I *won't* say you were *all* in the

right. But I am sorry, and I have been hideously unhappy all night, and—here is a kiss, if you want it from your

"BARBARA."

She ended by drawing a somewhat scraggy circle on the paper and placing her lips upon it, as children do when they send kisses in a letter; then sealed the little envelope with a huge, documentary-looking seal, and started off to slip it under Dering's door. After doing this she ran down-stairs, wishing to get away before he could call her, and was startled to see, lying on one of the hall tables, an envelope addressed to her in his handwriting.

She lifted it, with a sudden flash of pleasure quickening her face.

"How dear of him!" she said, in a low voice. "He has written to me, too!"

Alone under the big walnut-trees on the lawn, she stood still, and, thrusting an eager thumb beneath the flap of the envelope, tore it open: then saw that there was only a line or two, and her heart fell. This was Dering's message:

"DEAR BARBARA,—Bently has been badgering me for years to come and have a deer-hunt with him in the Ragged Mountains, and, as this seems about as good a time as any, I'm off. Yours,

"J."

Barbara stood gazing down at the bit of paper in her hand, while her lips and nostrils whitened slowly.

Mixed with the stab of pain, which came in the consciousness that he wished to leave her, was a vehement

feeling of wounded pride, when she reflected as to what others might say and think.

"They will say that he is bored; that he is tired of me; that I weary him." Then she turned and walked a little way, not seeing the objects about her very distinctly.

"How could he!" she said aloud, looking up at the dazzling autumn blue with its fret-work of little dark twigs, on which, here and there, spun a gay copper-colored leaf. That sharp feeling of repulsion and anger which had so consumed her a few hours ago returned stronger than ever. She walked slowly back to the house, and, opening Dering's door, lifted her note to him and, after smiling at it for a second, tossed it into the fire. His, however, she kept.

"I'll look at it whenever I'm inclined to be impul sive," she told herself. Then she sat down in one of the old oak chairs with which the lower hall was furnished, and, taking her chin into the palm of her right hand, stared before her at the vivid day outside. She had a distinct fear of pondering too deeply upon this new aspect of affairs, and made an effort to concentrate her thoughts upon the masses of small polished leaves which the great box-hedge in front of her was swinging gently in the light wind.

Before she knew exactly what had happened, a carriage stopped on the gravel, and some one, standing in slight silhouette on the threshold, knocked at the open door.

XI.

Barbara did not wait for a servant, but came forward herself, assuming a pretty look of hospitality. She did not recognize her visitor until within a few feet of her, and even then hesitated. It had been a long while since she had seen Eunice Denison,—twelve years at least, and they had both been school-girls then, and not intimate; but it seemed to her that this almost shadowy suppleness of outline and floating walk could not belong to another woman.

"Is it really you, Eunice?" she asked, a little shyly. "Yes, I see it is. You haven't changed much, after all. It's your expression, I think."

"And yours," returned Mrs. Bransby; "but somehow you look younger, Barbara."

"Do I?" said Barbara, still shy. She had never been quite at her ease with this woman, and now it seemed to her that the pale, clear little face was colder and less easy to read than ever. Mrs. Bransby had eyes of a cool blue, with graceful eyebrows and long curved lashes. Her dark, shining hair grew in great quantities from a broad but low band of forehead. Her mouth, with its wide, deeply-carved lips, was very lovely. She was one of those women whom fanciful people at once associate with frail and faintly-colored flowers, and in her dress of some soft lilac tint she reminded Barbara at this moment of a drowsy branch of heliotrope.

She entered the hall with her languid, swaying gait, and sank into the chair from which Barbara had just risen, looking about her and saying, finally,—

"What a pretty old hall! You must love this place very dearly, Barbara."

"Yes, I do," replied Barbara. "I never feel quite '*me*,' so to speak, anywhere else."

Mrs. Bransby gave her slow smile, and lifting her narrow, graceful hands in their gloves of pale-gray, *suède*, began to unfasten her veil.

"Oh, let me do it!" urged Barbara, girlishly. "You will strain your sleeves, and I do so love to 'potter about' people."

"I must be horribly frowzy," said Eunice, just touching the thick hair under her little hat of violets.

"Oh, no," said Barbara; "hair like yours is lovely blown about. But perhaps you would rather come to my room and arrange it."

"Thanks; you are very good. I should like that."

Admitting a guest into one's bedroom establishes at once a state of mental as well as physical ease. Barbara felt much less constrained as she moved about, arranging little details for her friend's comfort. She ended, to her own astonishment, by asking to be allowed to brush the wavy dark hair which Eunice had shaken over her shoulders, and soon the two were chattering brightly together, like children engaged in tricking each other out to look like "grown people."

Barbara found that Eunice had been married ten years, and that her two daughters were named Lois and Winifred; that her husband had bought an old house in the neighborhood called The Poplars, where they had now come to live, and that she was "oh, yes, quite happy."

"I am so glad that we are to live near each other," said Barbara, warmly. "Women do need women so

much sometimes. I have always wanted a real woman friend."

"I am so cold in my manner. I repel people so," murmured Eunice, coloring delicately. "I always manage to say the wrong thing."

"But what difference does manner make if one's heart is warm?" asked Barbara, earnestly. "Sometimes those people—those seemingly cold people, I mean—have the most glowing natures."

Mrs. Bransby, who had been looking rather sadly out of the window, now turned her quiet blue eyes upon Barbara, smiling a little.

"I am smiling because I fancy how astonished you would look if I told you something."

"Ah, do tell me!" said Barbara, leaning forward with her ardent air of self-forgetfulness. "Is it pleasant?"

"Oh, it's not anything very much; only—I'm not in the habit of saying such things. You can believe me. What I was thinking was this: you've always had such a strange, decided charm for me."

"I!" exclaimed Barbara, genuinely amazed. "Why, I thought you almost disliked me."

"No; I was a little afraid of you."

"Afraid of me! But why?"

"You were so vivid, so daring. You never seemed to be afraid of anything, to dread anything. I was always a mousie creature."

"But I don't dare everything now," said Barbara, shaking her head. "There are some things that I dread with all my heart. I understand how you feel, though."

"I was like a gray pigeon and you were like a cardinal-bird. You used to fascinate me. You had the

same charm for me that a generous wood-fire has for a chilly temperament, only I was always so afraid of boring you."

"Why, I had that same feeling about you," said Barbara. "You seemed so placid and self-contained. You were always reading some deep book. I thought that I would only disturb you if I spoke to you."

"I used to watch you from a distance," continued Eunice. "You seemed like a free woodland thing. There was such zest in your voice, in your laughter."

"And you," returned Barbara; "I used to watch you, too. You seemed like a delicate porcelain vase in which a love-letter is hidden. I longed to speak with you and ask you what you thought of life, of love."

"The less one dreams such dreams the nearer one is to content. I am teaching my girls not to have romantic ideas," said Eunice, with uneager bitterness. "I hope they will never marry."

"It is a great risk," Barbara admitted. She grew suddenly pale and felt that Eunice was regarding her questioningly.

"One never knows. There is no way of judging before marriage," she went on, falteringly.

"Barbara!" exclaimed the other. "Tell me. Why do you think that marriages are so often unhappy?"

"I don't know," answered Barbara, not meeting her eyes. "I don't know," she repeated, sadly. "There is something all wrong about it. One can never tell what will happen afterwards. For one thing, men are so much more material than we are. Passion with us is an imaginative, half-spiritual thing. Their ideas of it are generally very practical and matter-of-fact. A man cannot understand that his very way of taking

your hand in his may set your heart beating happily or chill you to the marrow."

Eunice's lips were parted. Her wide eyes were fastened upon Barbara. She seemed to be quivering through and through with some life-giving emotion. "Yes, yes," she said, in a tone of urgent expectancy, as Barbara paused.

"As a rule they don't care for the little things which make up life for us," Barbara went on. "I suppose women do regard detail too much. It's so in art as well as in love. We ought to look more to the broad masses and the general composition of things."

"I suppose a tack in one's shoe is a detail?" asked Eunice, quietly.

Somehow the two women found that their hands were tightly clasped together. Under an impulse entirely new to her Eunice leaned forward and pressed her lips to Barbara's forehead. When they looked at each other their eyes were full of tears.

XII.

When Eunice had gone away, Barbara walked down the low stone steps of the south porch upon the faded grass of the lawn. The day had grown warmer. The dim blue masses of the distant woods quivered through ascending sheets of intense, crystal-clear heat. A bird near by uttered a spring-like note. Barbara's unshaded face showed a pale-gold freckle here and there in the dazzle of autumn light. Her hair was a splendid banner of fire. As she walked onward with her buoyant, power-suggesting gait, her white gown beat-

ing about her in the wind, with motions suggestive of a happy freedom, there was a tired, unhopeful look in her eyes, which seemed out of key with the rest of her vivid being.

She reached a gate crusted with flat rosettes of green-gray, black-lined lichens, paused, hesitated, then, resting her arms along its top, stared out into the shimmer of delicate air. Perhaps it was the contrast of her own sadness, but as she stood there a sense of the world-joy that was pulsing in the sunlit spaces about her began to seep into her senses, physical and mental. A small, green creature on the top of the gate near her elbow stretched out first one fine serrated leg, then the other, then spread its frail wings, refolded them in their brittle-looking sheaths, and slowly waving its hair-like antennæ, began a shrill, vibrant chirr of absolute content. A spider was busily engaged in weaving its web between the latch of the gate and a lilac twig above; not a foot away, in the warm grass, something stirred, glided, was still. She had that subtle sense of being gazed at. Staring more intensely, she saw a pair of sparkling eyes, no larger than one seed of a blackberry, set obliquely in an arrow-shaped head. The young snake remained breathless to her sight, its burning, bronze-brown squares unchanging, its dapper head erect.

"I would not hurt you, my dear," said Barbara, addressing it, gravely. "Why are you afraid? Go home to your pretty mate."

At the sound of her voice the moccasin lowered its crest and slithered away under an evergreen beside the gate.

She smiled to herself, "I should have killed it, I suppose. It was a poisonous snake. But why kill a

thing that is only poisonous in self-defence? Besides, these sun-rays reached us both at the same moment, and we both love sunlight. Somehow, on a day like this, one is conscious with a great triumph that God makes his sun to shine on the just and the unjust, on serpents as well as on flowers, that His whole world to its very core is glowing with His love. You, too, little one. I won't spoil your wheel of lace. I shall be undignified and climb instead."

Putting her hands on the low gate, she sprang, boy-like, into the field beyond. The atmosphere of the day was a warm violet in the shadows, a rose-gold in the light. The nestling straw-stacks, in the hollow of a near meadow, shone silver dashed with pink. The golden-rod was turning to ashes on its tall stalks. Little apple-like, yellow balls, growing low in the rank weeds, tapped against her feet as she passed. She was walking aimlessly, striving to draw into herself some of the plenteous sufficiency of the hour. Her thoughts danced as changefully as the glistening cloud of gnats that spun before her in circles of steely light. As she nibbled a bit of sassafras which she had broken in passing, her thoughts flew back to her childhood, to her girlhood. She dropped the sweet-smelling twig suddenly and stood quite still. She could see Valentine standing there beside her, the flash of his smile, his extended hand, slender, strong.

"How these childish things come back! foolish jests! little, trivial love-speeches!" It seemed to her that her heart trembled within her. "I must reason with myself," she said, aloud. "I see quite clearly that I would have been far braver, far nobler, if I had contented myself with the memory of my dear——" She broke off again, then went on in a whisper, the tears

falling: "Oh, he is my dear! I cannot help that, my love for him is so pure, so high, it cannot clash with any duty. Why do I always remember those dreadful words,—'Yet I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love'? God's face seems always frowning upon me. Dear Val, dear Val, be my good angel and help me, and teach me how to be good, how to do what is right!"

She lifted her tear-washed face, with eyes closed and quivering and hands pressed against her breast.

When she went back to the house, it was with the determination to accept naturally and with courage the life which she had prepared for herself.

It was a week later that Rameses knocked at the door with a telegram, which ran as follows: "Splendid weather. First-rate sport. Four big fellows for the hall. Be with you at six P.M." She could not help laughing as she recalled the king's letter in Ruy Blas: "*Madame, il a fait beaucoup de vent et j'ai tué sept loups.*"

Barbara had suffered intensely during the past week. She was not exactly in the mood which Dering would have chosen her to wear for his reception. Instead of answering his wire, she sat down at once and wrote a pretty note to Eunice Bransby, asking her to spend the afternoon and dine with her: of course, if Mr. Bransby was at The Poplars, she hoped he would come too.

When Dering reached the station, a few hours later, he felt rather astonished to see that Barbara was not in the trap which had been sent to meet him. Then he gave his shoulders a half-pleased, half-vexed shake, and muttered to himself, "She's still sulking, the big darling!" He thought that it would be excessively pleasant to spend the next hour or so in coaxing her

out of the dumps, and drew little imaginary sketches as he sent the cart rattling vehemently over the abominable roads.

"She'll be cold at first, the blessed angel,—awfully cold; then she'll give me the devil of a dose of sarcasm, then she'll get rather sad and forlorn, the beauty! Gad! how I do dote on her! Get along, you snail, or I'll sell you! You can't trot against a cat! Then—let me see. I don't know whether I'll hold her and kiss her or not. I'll just get my arms around her, and she'll probably kiss me. What a mouth! And how proud she is, the vixen! By Jove! she *is* a vixen! Couldn't have stood any other kind. Does me lots of good; as for that, egad! *I'll* do *her* a lot before we're through! It's like spanking a queen with her sceptre to tell her of her faults. I swear it is!" He broke off and laughed appreciatively, a gay, boyish laugh. His eyes were clear and bright as gems. There was a wholesome brownness over his face and throat. His curls needed cutting. He had suffered as well as Barbara during this eventful week, but in an entirely different way. Her emotions had been conflicting, tearing, of the kind that wears holes in the fabric of the spirit. Dering's had consisted of an intense desire to be with her, to return and let her bully him to her heart's content, and, at the same time, of a virile, almost sullen determination to remain where he was. But it is impossible to be a genuine sportsman, in pursuit of big game, and to allow entirely sentimental passions to absorb you. Dering had finally yielded, without reserve, to the woodland soothing which stole over him. After each day's hard shooting he had been too tired to do more than fling himself down on his bed of pine boughs and sleep like an exhausted boy.

When he reached Rosemary, one vigorous leap took him from the wheel to the portico. She was not there to meet him. He gave his shoulders another shake, and began darting into different rooms in search of her. At last his face softened, and he said,—

"The dear! She's waiting for me in our room."

He went up the stairs on tiptoe, three steps at a time. At Barbara's door he paused. She was talking to some one, probably Rameses. He waited a second longer and then entered.

"Oh! it's you, Jock?" said Barbara, coming forward with a cup of tea in her hand. "How nice and brown you look! This is Mrs. Bransby,—Eunice Denison. I've told you about her often."

Dering had a flashing desire to grind, with disagreeable intensity, the slim hand which Mrs. Bransby held out to him. His anger against Barbara came back with a force which astonished him. It was like the slap of a wave whose force and distance one has miscalculated. He turned off, saying, curtly, "No, thanks. I don't want any tea. There's a parcel for you that came by express, Barbara, and two letters. Do you know where Tobit is? I want a tub."

Tobit was rung for, and Barbara came back smiling, somewhat selfishly, Eunice thought. "Can you be a little cruel sometimes, Barbara?" she asked in her pale voice.

Barbara tossed her head back on the frame of her chair and let the firelight gild her throat.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "Most of us can and do, I suppose. But it's nonsense to call us like cats. Are lions never cruel, may I ask?"

"In a different way," said Eunice. "Cats know how to produce a more elaborate suffering."

"You are mistaken if you think I like to make people suffer," returned Barbara, a little coldly.

"Dear Barbara," said the other, "I did not say that you liked to be cruel. It is only that—that——" She paused, her face flushing.

"That what, dear?" asked Barbara, with one of her swift changes to entire gentleness.

"It is this," went on Eunice, speaking rapidly and looking down: "I feel that your husband has a *grande passion* for you. It seems a senseless thing to say, after just this glimpse of him. I never spoke so to any one before. But—but such feeling is—is very rare. All women don't win it. It—it is a mistake to think that men as men are necessarily very intense in their feelings." Barbara knew, by the quick pulses in the hand which she had taken in hers, how her friend's heart was beating. Eunice glanced at her shyly, almost timidly.

"He looked so disappointed when he saw me," she said, in a low voice. "I—I—— Do let me go away now, Barbara. I can explain it perfectly to Godfrey, and we can come to-morrow instead."

"No," said Barbara, her face hardening again. "No; I shall be very hurt if you go. We were having the most delightful talk. But, of course, if you want to——"

"Oh, no! no, truly!" exclaimed Eunice, hurriedly. "Please don't think me impertinent. Of course, you know best. Only—— We were talking of Sara in Cleopatra, I think."

"Ah, yes! that was it. Do you remember how she says, '*Pure politique n'est-ce pas'?*"

XIII.

Barbara and Godfrey Bransby were mutually repelled at first sight. It was a mental sensation exactly corresponding to the physical one which may disturb the most excellent cat in the world at the sight of the worthiest dog.

Bransby could not have explained himself clearly, but the color of Barbara's hair struck him as being too intense for good form, and her figure suggested a pedestal so forcibly as to be rather theatric. He thought of the different stage Galateas whom he had seen, and was forced to the conclusion that Mrs. Dering would fill the *rôle* more completely than any of the others. He did not like the easy grace of her attitudes. She looked too strong for a woman. Her powdering of faint yellow freckles was too realistic. She struck him as an American autumn strikes some artists, as too vivid, too daring, too brightly-colored. Bransby was fond of saying that he looked upon woman as the highest product of Christianity, and Barbara suggested Paganism in all its broader meanings, just as her figure suggested that of a heathen goddess. When he found in the course of the evening that she could ride half-broken colts, train a dog thoroughly, keep a shuttlecock up to a thousand, swim, run, and jump like a boy, he could hardly keep his violent dissent from showing in his face.

"I have scarcely any doubt," he told Eunice, on his way home, "that Mrs. Dering is the sort of woman who smokes cigarettes. I trust that you will be very

guarded in your relations with her. She seems to me most unfeminine. That dagger-like arrangement that she wore in her hair struck me as disagreeably barbaric. Then she said several things that I considered decidedly irreverent, not to say verging on the blasphemous. That anecdote from 'Life,' in which a child alludes to the Deity and Santa Claus in the same sentence, was, to me, intensely shocking. I also heard her say something about Rossetti. I hope, Eunice, that you will promise me that you will not let Mrs. Dering lead you into reading such authors. They are unwholesome and unnatural. These overstrained sensations are not what men and women feel nowadays. I am devoutly thankful, my dear, that you are a sensible, practical, self-contained woman. You make me very happy indeed."

At this point he had taken her hand loosely in his and brushed the corner of her mouth with his stiff moustache. As he leaned back again in his side of the carriage, he did not see the rather odd smile that stirred his wife's lips.

The dinner had not been very exhilarating. Barbara accentuated the bad impression she had made on Bransby by talking a great deal. Dering, who had a royal way of remaining entirely silent when he chose, said not a word, while Bransby was politely non-committal, and Eunice struggled shyly with a sense of embarrassment, born of the knowledge that she and her husband were the cause of Dering's ill-humor.

"How on earth did you come to strike up such an intimacy with these people?" demanded Dering, crossly, when the Bransbys had left. "The man's cut out for a monk. I never saw a more bloodless, self-satisfied rigidarian, to coin a word. You wonder how

he ever permitted himself the indulgence of marriage!"

"He is detestable," said Barbara, "but she is lovely. She makes me think of a lovely Ice maiden——"

"Bah!" returned Dering, with gruffness; "she isn't cold. It's the man. He's a monstrosity."

"He probably thinks that we are monstrosities," said Barbara, easily.

"Yes, he hates you cordially, my dear. I wonder he lets his wife associate with you."

"Perhaps he won't, now that he has met me."

"Perhaps not. What a jolly awakening she must have had after her marriage!"

"Marriage has rather that result, as a rule."

"Well, you ought to be a good judge," said Dering, brutally, goaded to this by the insinuation of her remark.

Barbara left the room. Opening the hall door, she went out into the rich darkness. After a while she could see objects dimly, and the sharp stars that pierced through the film of night. Wilful was cropping grass near the tall acacia clumps. She whistled and he came to her, feeling for sugar with his velvety lips. Then, her arms about his strong neck, she let the tears gush as they would, while he rubbed his head against her so ardently that she was pressed rather roughly against the stem of one of the trees behind her. A snuffing sound about her feet startled her. Dering's Irish setter had found her and was leaping up in the gloomy air.

"Good boy! you've found her," said Dering's voice, not two yards away. "Down, now; down, you brute! Did he frighten you, Barbara? Darling! I've come to tell you how sorry I am."

She began to sob despairingly, her arms still about the neck of Wilful, who was too familiar with "Brick" to have been startled by his sudden appearance.

"Oh, Barbara, Barbara," said Dering, agonized, "what a devil I am sometimes! I honestly believe I am possessed. How I have hurt you! What can I say? Everything seems so tame. Look! I kneel to you, dearest; I worship you; I adore you; you are my queen, as always."

"You—you—I am sure you didn't mean it," said Barbara, stammering.

"Oh, but I did, I did!" cried Dering, with terrible honesty. "You will never know how it galls and stings me sometimes, darling, to remember that you loved some one before you loved me. It's like red-hot nippers tearing me. That's all, Barbara, I swear it. When I'm cruel to you, try to remember that."

"Yes, it is dreadful. It is dreadful to me, too," sobbed Barbara. Dering dragged away her hands, and bent his face so near that she felt his quick breaths.

"Barbara, we are very cruel to each other sometimes," he whispered; "but *au fond*, we love each other more than most,—eh, dearest? Look! I am famished for a kiss! Oh, Barberina, I have thought of your lips all this past week! What a fool, what a double-dyed fool, I was to go away from you! Will you kiss me now, my blessed angel? I'm a starved Jock."

"Oh!" sighed Barbara, lifting her arms from Wilful's neck, "if you love me, what does it all matter?" And he took her to his heart.

"Now," he said, peremptorily, after a few moments, "come into the house and let me make you comfortable. What an evening we can have over our wood-fire! Oh, my dearie, what it is to be with you again!"

He took her up to their room, and, after finding her dressing-gown which he liked best, began to brush out and plait her heavy hair.

"Sometimes, Jock, you treat me exactly like a big doll," she said, with a smile, as she let her head give to his eager brushings.

"A doll! I never thought of such a thing. You are the most delicious morsel of flesh and blood I ever imagined."

"Oh, please don't speak to me as though I were an ortolan!" said Barbara, rather pettishly. She felt chilled, and that her mood was arrested all of a sudden. Dering threw the brush on the table and stood before the fire, grinning a little.

"You dear seraph!" he said. "I suppose you'd really appreciate the sort of husband that St. Cecilia had. I can't help being a man's man. I wish to Heaven I did have more of the feminine in me, but it just isn't there. What are we going to do about it?"

"If you would listen to me," began Barbara slowly, her eyes on the fire.

"Oh, Barbara!" he exclaimed, throwing himself against her knees and clasping the arms of her chair in either hand, "don't be artificial! I'm not in the mood to appreciate the sisterly, sweet hand-in-hand affair. I warn you, frankly. You are the most beautiful of women, and not my sister, but my wife. Would you really have me love you as your brother, Barbara?"

"No! no, indeed!" she assured him. "But——"

"But what? but what?" he repeated, eagerly. "Are you going to criticise the laws of God? Do you mean to say, 'Yes, of course, Providence is right, but it seems strange He didn't order things another way. *I* should have made love less vehement?' That sort of

stuff always seemed to me such impertinent bosh, dear. I love you as God meant men to love their wives,—intensely, wholly. You are not my sister; I am not your brother."

"A perfect love is both spiritual and passionate," said Barbara, timidly. "Men—most men—will not understand that. I—I don't deny that, Jock. I only mean that if you were more gentle!—women love that sort of love. They must cast out fear before they can love perfectly."

"Are you afraid of me, then, Barbara?"

"Not of you,—of your moods sometimes."

Dering got to his feet and stood pulling his moustache soberly.

"Men don't understand women, do they?" he asked, finally.

"Perhaps we don't understand men any better," admitted Barbara.

"It's all this accursed civilization," he grumbled on; "our race is getting anæmic. It isn't your fault; you're a *fin-du-siècle* woman, and can't help yourself. I'm a savage and ought to be tamed."

"If you mean by *fin-du-siècle* that I'm a Laodicean creature like the woman in '*Notre Cœur*,' you are very wrong. I seem to explain myself very badly. I irritate you, and that makes me very awkward."

"Well, I don't seem to do anything *but* irritate *you*," returned Dering. "You make me feel a colossal idiot. It's my fault, of course."

"I told you I should disappoint you," said Barbara, in a whisper.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, exasperated as usual after one of their jolting discussions, "why do you always hark back to that beaten old covert? I am not disappointed;

I am only trying to get at your point of view. It seemed to me that I rather got on with you before our marriage, and now I only seem to fuss you up."

Barbara was suddenly convinced that she was in the wrong,—nothing but the present moment seemed clear to her. He was there, young, loving, bonny. She had wounded him. She was his wife. He gave her unstinted and impassioned devotion. Also Eunice's words came back to her: "I feel that your husband has a *grande passion* for you. . . . Such feeling is very rare. All women don't win it." She looked up at him with an exquisite glow of love in her large eyes and opened her arms. Stooping a little, he lifted her upon his breast.

"Is it all right, Barbara?"

"Yes, my own."

"You forgive me?"

"Yes."

"Fully, freely?"

"Oh, my dearest!" she said, looking up at him. A sort of touched quiver went over his face, and then he bent it down against hers.

XIV.

In spite of her suddenly affectionate mood the night before, Dering was conscious, upon thinking matters over, that Barbara after marriage, compared with Barbara during their engagement, rather reminded him of Rosamond's famous purple jar. He could not explain the apparent change in her nature and character, and it never occurred to him that certain changes in himself

had anything to do with it. He felt aggrieved, misled, baffled. Women seemed to him impossible creatures, to whom the attraction of the moon consisted in the fact that its other side remained a mystery. As for all this talk of soul and communion of heart and spirituality, it might do very well in a convent or monastery, or even between a certain angelic description of minister and his female parishioners, but between two young, vigorous, glowing beings, it was either a pose or a failure. He had a sore, angry feeling that Barbara looked down upon his love for her as something to be put up with, since he was that singularly constituted being, a man, and could not help himself. He wondered, with a fierce contraction of his heart, whether, if they had a child, she would not love it far more than she did him, and his feeling of secret contempt for the dead Valentine grew in proportion to what he considered Barbara's unreasonable and difficult humors. "What a precious molly-coddle he must have been if he submitted to this sort of thing!" he reflected moodily. "I don't believe he had any force or fire in him." It seemed to him that his salamander was growing cool in his hand,—was turning to a bit of charcoal. His manner, however, did not give a hint of the resentful bitterness accumulating within, and Barbara thought that she was acting up to his most exacting demand in thus keeping from him the restless questionings and doubts which filled her own mind.

Another form taken by his concealed irritation was that of a steady dislike for the Bransbys. It was as inevitable that he and Bransby should clash as that there should be a sputter when ice and fire come in contact. Mrs. Bransby, however, was not so distasteful to him personally. His objection to Barbara's growing

intimacy with her was that objection felt by so many men to the confidences apt to be exchanged between not entirely happy married women, and which so frequently include the husbands in the case. That Barbara should discuss him, directly or indirectly, with any one roused in him a very frenzy of anger. Then, too, he felt for Eunice that grand scorn which very strong young things are apt to feel for those which are paler and more fragile. He did not comprehend the attitude of apparent agreement which she adopted towards her husband. She seemed to him cowardly and dull, and he wondered why Barbara liked to be with her. Besides, the very fact that his wife should care so much for another woman's society showed that he was not sufficient in his position of husband.

Miss Fridiswig found him less like Valentine day by day, and at last wrote him down in her diary as "an exceedingly rude young man, with an unregenerate temper;" and if he considered Barbara to be changed by marriage, his aunt-in-law pronounced him to be quite another person. He was shortly freed from such comment, however, as about this time Miss Fridis left Rosemary to make her home with her only sister.

One of the most curious transformations which had taken place in him was the growing desire to remodel Barbara into an entirely different woman. Traits that had charmed him in her as a sweetheart seemed totally out of place in a wife. He felt instinctively that Bransby disapproved of her exuberant vitality, and while he longed to thrash Bransby, he told himself that Barbara was too untrammelled, both in her opinions and in her mode of expressing them. In a word, he was overwhelmed by that subtle sense of responsibility in the bride, which so often prevents modern bridegrooms

from being as thoroughly joyous as their position might seem to warrant.

Like most of us, Dering possessed two distinct natures, and as he had once said to Barbara during their first days of acquaintance, if his cousin had been Valentine he was certainly Orson. This bit of self-accusation was true to some extent, and the conviction regarding her lack of love for him which from time to time forced itself upon him brought to the surface all the irritability and harshness which was generally dormant in his really sunny nature. He was bewildered, nettled, disgusted, at this change in himself, but the very fact of the self-control which he exercised for the most part made his lapses, when they did come, more vehement.

At one time he told himself that she did not love him. At another time that she was incapable of loving any one. Again, it was a vague, dreary jealousy of the dead Valentine, whose ghost seemed ever sliding in between them. The very fact of the temporary idleness in which they were living served to whet his temper and make him restless and nervous, for he was a man of intense physical activity, given to all sorts of athletic sports, such as polo-playing, racquets, excursions into wild countries after big game, and the monotony of Rosemary was beginning to pall upon him, even in spite of Barbara's presence. He was anxious to go to Melton for the winter, and feared that this suggestion might not meet with her approval, although she knew that he was, before anything, a being of active out-door life. His entire lack of self-analysis and anything like an appreciation of involved imaginative temperaments was another element of discord between them.

As Eunice had said, his feeling for his wife was certainly a "*grande passion*," and the doubt of her love for him drove him at times to desperation. Once or twice when alone in his own room or out on horseback hot, scalding drops had been wrung from him by what he considered her almost cold-hearted course towards him. As for tenderness, he regarded it as the accompaniment to weak and sluggish natures, and despised it accordingly. Barbara did not imagine what he suffered, and, in her turn, doubted the quality of his love for her. She sometimes thought that she had worn out his patience by her unlucky habit of introspection, and made daily resolutions as to reserve and caution in her talks with him, which were, however, not always kept unbroken.

A man who has had very little experience of gentlewomen buys very dearly his knowledge of his wife. Dering was fond of saying that he was no carpet-knight, and his lack of all effeminacy was very admirable, but there is a certain feminine quality without which the character of no man is wholly lovable, and the possession of which does not signify weakness but strength. Dering was male to the core. His very religion had a sort of fierceness in it. His love of life included a fiery criticism of its shortcomings,—even coarseness to him seemed pardonable as a sort of exuberant vitality. He loved all animals and yet was an ardent sportsman, and could shoot his ailing dogs and horses when occasion demanded.

He had more respect for a daring criminal than for a weak saint. The warlike and revengeful God of the Jews was more to his taste than the Messiah, although, in accordance with a strange and contradictory conventionality, he was apparently the most orthodox of Christians.

Fierce, bright, conquering women were his ideals. A virtuous Cleopatra seemed to him the perfection of womanhood. He saw nature actual and mental in crude, brilliant colors, unmodified by any half-tones. One phase of Barbara's character had captivated him, and he thought he knew the entire woman. Marriage developed different and more complicated aspects of disposition, and he was baffled, indignant. Life for him was divided into the well-defined and charming emotions, first, that of keen delight; second, that of practical enjoyment. That his kisses should fail to thrill the woman he loved because his mood did not harmonize with hers would have seemed to him a diverting absurdity. That to be called "a tigress" and roughly embraced when her whole being craved gentleness and consideration, should stir in her profound depths of opposition, he would have regarded as impossible. His nature was of so savage a vitality that he preferred the cruelest exuberance of feeling to its sweetest restraint.

Physical suffering, except in its forms of positive anguish, did not appeal to him. The lassitude of lesser ailments only galled him, and produced an assured belief that they were the result of self-indulgence and could be dispelled by a brisk drive or walk. Religious questioning found in him only a fierce intolerance. He was quick and harsh in his judgments, especially of women, but only in regard to faults of hypocrisy, falseness, self-righteousness: with an unexpected and beautiful tenderness, the sins of frailty he always pardoned. He was generous to excess, and his generosity was not restricted to material matters. His sympathy went out to the whole world He longed to lead men to a higher platform,—to widen their views, their hopes,

their ambitions. In some respects he was a singularly reserved man. It was strange how little he spoke of himself and his feelings, when his whole being was sometimes concentrated for days in the efforts to discover some vent for his powerful energies. He had never been really unconditionally in love until he saw Barbara. The two or three sentiments in which he had before indulged were all backed by excellent reasons, and coldly analyzed as they progressed until they had finally ended in *ennui*. His code of ethics had been that of most club-men, and formulated would have run something in this way: "Have your fling as a young fellow. Do everything that amuses you, so long as you live up to the social idea of a gentleman and don't wrong any virtuous woman." He added one clause, however: "Be true to your wife after marriage."

Before his marriage with Barbara, Dering had been positive of many things which now appeared far less certain. He had often told himself that were he to make a mistake and find himself bound to a cold, prudish, unloving woman, he would leave her without a qualm and make a new life for himself in some other part of the world. But in all his ideas of life and marriage he had never accepted genuine, passionate love as a factor, and now its vast glare had blotted out all lesser twinklings, while its rays, concentrated in the burning-glass of present feeling, shrivelled the flimsy theories upon which they struck, as actual rays wither bits of paper.

Not that he considered Barbara cold or prudish. She had certainly been rather cold to him for some time, but he felt sure that it was not a real characteristic of her nature, and that in reality she was the glow-

ing creature that he had thought her from the first. It was this very conviction that frenzied him. In spite of her care, her affectionate ways, her pretty moods of half-childish coaxing and love-making, Dering felt that he did not touch the central spring of her nature. There was some way in which he failed. Some way in which she tacitly criticised him, and, as he had once said in a bitter mood, compared him to some secret standard which he failed to reach.

The old *abandon* had gone from her voice and eyes. He was sometimes conscious, with a withering at his heart, that she drew away from his kisses and then returned them, all the more eagerly, to make up for the involuntary motion.

She had at times moods of deep despondency which jarred upon him inexpressibly. Again, she would wander off into the winter woods alone and be gone for hours, with only her deerhound and the Angora kitten, which often followed her on her long walks in spite of ice and mud. On these occasions Dering accepted with a dogged bitterness his position of unwanted husband, and never attempted to find her or to meet her on her return. Painful scenes constantly took place between them, in which the blame was often on both sides. She was not of a yielding or submissive nature, however, and the two strong wills tested each other in fierce tussles, which very frequently failed to advance the supremacy of either. In the intervals between such encounters these singular beings often spent days of gay companionship, during which they would both fancy that the cruel scenes of the past could never be renewed.

XV.

Godfrey Bransby was one of those men who, when they marry a woman, decide that she must find in her husband the end and fulfilment of every desire. His egotism was of the Oriental sort, which requires that whatever charm the beloved may possess it must be exercised only for the lover, the owner. Eunice had a sweet contralto voice; but since her marriage she had only sung for Bransby, except on certain rare occasions when he had allowed her to exercise her talent for the benefit of the choir in his native parish. He did not entirely approve of her singing her babies to sleep, but so long as she chose hymns for lullabies made no positive objection. On most points of domestic freedom he was very rigid. He considered low-necked gowns immoral, no matter how modestly they were cut, and although Eunice had charming round arms and shoulders like rose-petals, her evening-dresses were always made with the severity of a bride's, up almost to the lobes of her small ears and close about the wrists. He permitted no artificial curling of her hair. The trimming of her pretty oval nails was superintended conscientiously, and she was made to cut them in a natural curve, instead of the sharp points which were then in vogue. Ear-rings were forbidden. Open-work silk stockings pronounced indecent on account of the little glimmer of flesh which showed through the fine meshes; also every very close-fitting style of corsage.

Mentally, his supervision was, if anything, more strict. Eunice was requested not to read certain novels, be-

ginning with "The Heart of Midlothian," "Adam Bede," and "Jane Eyre," and ending with "La Morte" and "Robert Elsmere." Even some of Tennyson's poems were tabooed, such as "Fatima," "Launcelot and Guinevere," "Love and Duty." Browning was only permitted in selections, while the only copy of Walt Whitman which ever found its way into the house was burned leaf by leaf, having been dismembered with the tongs to prevent the contamination of direct contact. The word "passion" and the state of mind which it expressed he considered equally coarse and undesirable. A wife, he had said, should be a delicate echo, and respond only when her husband had spoken. He considered that a glacial demeanor was necessary to proper respect in his attitude towards the woman who bore his name. His modes of expressing his affection for her were automatic and his words of endearment precise and bloodless.

After being thrown with Bransby for a while, one felt sure that had he been allowed an interview with Providence he would have suggested certain modifications in the method of existence, proposing in definite and well-considered terms a new plan of creation in which bodies would be made out of some non-sensitive material and nature reduced to a calm propriety. Eunice was made to understand frequently in many indirect ways that Bransby had asked her to become his wife from necessity rather than choice, and that, had the world permitted such a relationship, he would greatly have preferred their tie to be that of a fond brother and sister. His children he seemed to regard with chill philosophy as the outgrowth of a material and mistaken system on the part of nature, and his nearest approach to any paternal interest had been when, at

Winifred's birth, he had expressed his regret that the child was not a boy.

In appearance he was small, slight, blond, with exquisitely modelled hands and feet. His hair was of a straight, pale brown, his eyes the same color. He wore a short, pointed beard, which was here and there streaked with gray, and his lips were colorless, but well-shaped.

When he had first met Eunice Denison she had been a girl of eighteen, shy, reserved, romantic, and full of a pure and hidden fire. Bransby had seemed to her the ideal of all that was princely and soul-satisfying. As a lover, his somewhat metallic manner had appeared only a refined self-control. Her own intense emotion had filled his touch with a magnetism which it never had, and when his lips touched hers in the first kiss her virginal nature thrilled to its very centre by the idea of self-surrender rather than by any actual contact, did not stop to demand if the caress were warm or cold. Now, after ten years of marriage, she had learned to look upon her own former innocent exuberance of love as something unrefined, unwomanly, undesirable,—to conquer every natural, healthy impulse of affection, to force into silence the cravings of her keen and delicate nature. Her husband's kisses were placed upon her cheek or forehead ; when he took her hand, it was in a limp and almost deprecatory clasp. He repelled all confidences of an emotional or introspective nature, and was annoyed if on his birthday or at Christmas any especial souvenir was prepared for him by Eunice. He considered the custom childish and overstrained. It was absurd, he said, to expect a rational creature, at a stated time, to be in a mood either to receive or bestow certain gifts. Besides, it suggested an insufficiency in their surroundings which was dis-

tasteful to him. If his wife desired anything she had only to tell him of that desire. He could think of nothing that she lacked. Jewels he detested, with the exception of pearls, and Eunice had several magnificent strings of the moony globules. With jewels out of the question, nothing occurred to him that would make an appropriate present. His children did not love him in the least, and were very candid in their admission of this fact to each other, but never confided it to their mother, although she shared every other thought of their inmost souls, because, as Win expressed it, "Mammas are generally fond of papas, even when they're rather horrid, and it might hurt her to know we quite abominate him." Lois agreed that this was a very wise and rational conclusion, and so their most fervid dislike of their father was only expressed by the demurest silence.

Bransby's views on religion were also very narrow and severe. On Sunday his wife and daughters were required to go to church twice, in all sorts of weather, while pastimes of every kind and the reading of any but religious books was forbidden. He believed in a hell of actual flame, in predestination, and that all persons who had once unworthily partaken of the Holy Communion had eaten and drunk their own damnation, and were without hope of future salvation. At least these were some of the theories which Bransby believed that he believed; his whole inner man was such a tangled web of artificialities and acquired opinions that it was difficult to decide which was the original creature and which the stuff of created personality.

As for his dislike of Barbara, it increased each time that they were thrown together. There was something in her keen presence which accentuated his

own incapacity for feeling of any kind, and which caused him to experience a sensation resembling that of an ill-humored and gouty person who is forced to watch the blithe movements of a happy child. In addition to this her very existence was a contradiction of all his theories about the submissive attitude which was required of woman in the married relation. Barbara expressed her own views fully on all subjects, often took the lead in conversation, and did not hesitate to disagree with her husband openly and in the frankest manner. She had her own ideas on the position of wives, the education of children, the race question, the future of women, and the attributes of the Diety. She had said on one occasion that she considered women in many respects the superiors of men, and to verify her statement had quoted Goethe's words:

"The woman soul leads us upward and on."

She had said that she thought the clause "Serve and obey" should be struck from the marriage service,—that it was a formula of slavery, not the proud declaration of a willing and equal comradeship. She had even stated that she thought it wrong to require two people to swear by the most solemn oaths to love each other until death did them part, since love was controllable only in a negative sense, and could not be compelled into being; that if it once ceased to exist there was no power which had ever been known to resurrect it, whether by command or exhortation.

Bransby, when in her presence, felt himself dominated by a more vigorous individuality, and was unpleasantly conscious that her clear eyes pierced through the flimsy veil of self-important reserve with which he had rendered mysterious his philosophy of domestic

existence, much after the fashion in which sheets of gauze are lowered between the audience and the ghost in clever dramatic performances.

His aversion to her reached its height one morning when, during Eunice's absence, he opened a note from Barbara to her, marked by the word "Immediate," strongly underscored.

"DEAREST," Barbara had written,—"Can you come to me? I need you desperately. I need your wise, quiet judgment. I am very, very wretched,—more so than I should dare put into words. I seem to have come to the end of the world and to be gazing into gulfs of whirling blackness. Oh, you see how I exaggerate even now when I do not wish to do so! My heart feels like a ball of red-hot metal in my breast. I long, I almost pray for tears, but they will not come. We have grown so close during the last weeks that I seem to feel your dear heart beating against mine. I trust you. I believe in you. I honor you. I have always dreamed of a perfect friendship with some woman, and in you I have found all that I could ask. I am so humble. You shall scold me as though I were a very child, like dear Win or Lois. I will do what you say, Eunice darling, only come and help me. I know you will come. I know you will let nothing keep you, and I pray that I may not have to wait long for you.

YOUR BARBARA."

XVI.

When Eunice returned from her ride Bransby met her in the hall with Barbara's note in his hand. She unwound her long veil of gray gauze while he spoke to her, wondering at the look of pale concentration on his face. "Here is a note, Eunice, which was sent to you by Mrs. Dering a few moments after you left. I could not, of course, have had any idea of the frenzied and personal nature of its contents. I must say that it adds to my unfavorable opinion of Mrs. Dering. It is exaggerated, morbid, overstrained,—I might even say, indelicate. It is unpleasant to me to think of your having with this woman an intimacy such as she alludes to. It is also intensely disagreeable to me to have her address you in violent terms of endearment such as I have never permitted myself to use. In a word, I hope that when you answer this unrestrained and unfeminine effusion you will find some dignified and lady-like method of expressing your disapproval to the writer, and of telling her, at the same time, that you will be unable to call on her to-day."

During this speech Eunice stood very quiet by one of the broad hall-windows, her riding-crop bent across her black skirt, the outline of her cheek traced airily under a furze of goldish strands. Once or twice the blood had streamed into her face even to her clear temples. When her husband finished speaking, she held out her hand before answering him, as though to receive her note.

Bransby gave it to her in the envelope. "I will

wait for you to read it," he said. 'You can then judge for yourself whether I am justified in my opinion."

It seemed to him that she took rather long to master its contents. "I presume, of course, that you agree with me?" he said finally.

There was a slight pause; Eunice felt her heart beating quickly. She had never before thought it worth while to oppose her opinion to that of her husband. She now said, speaking rather slowly, "No, I do not agree with you, Godfrey. I am sure you don't understand Barbara. Then, too, you must remember that this note was not meant for you to see. I am very sorry that you should have chanced to read it."

Bransby could not believe that he had grasped her exact meaning. "Do you intend to say that you endorse those extravagant, unrefined ravings which you hold in your hand?" he demanded finally.

"I think that Barbara has a passionate, emotional nature, and that she has written to me under the pressure of some great pain," answered Eunice. "There is nothing in her words that strikes me as unrefined."

"Does this mean that you intend opposing me in the matter and continuing your friendship with Mrs. Dering?" asked Bransby, coldly.

"I should be sorry to oppose you in anything, Godfrey. I hope that you do not think me so utterly lacking in character and principle as to be contaminated by Barbara Dering, even if she were all that you think her, and I hope that you will not absolutely forbid my answering the cry of a fellow-creature who is in such desperate straits."

"I am not a petty tyrant," said Bransby, stiffly.

"If my wishes are not enough in such a case, I should despise myself for resorting to commands."

"I am glad of that," answered Eunice, with a certain shy firmness, "for I should have felt obliged to go in any case. The promises of friendship seem as sacred as oaths to me."

"Yes, as sacred as your marriage vows apparently," said Bransby, crimsoning. "Do you mean to tell me openly that you would disobey me in order to keep some sentimental agreement made with this headstrong woman?"

"I promised to honor you when I promised to obey," said Eunice, in a low voice. "Could I honor you if, just in order to show your authority, you were to try to make me cruel to some one of whom I am very fond?"

"Upon my word," sneered Bransby, "I see the effect of her untrammelled teachings upon you already. You make an apt pupil, my dear Eunice. I had never thought to hear my wife, one whom I thought the quintessence of gentlewomanly refinement, treat me to a display of the vulgar, modern ideas on the sacred subject of matrimony."

Eunice lifted to his her clear blue eyes. "Don't say such things to me, Godfrey. It is not just. I am sure that a poor friend could only make a poor wife. I would not be human if I could listen in coldness to this prayer for help. I must go to her, Godfrey, and at once; I hope you won't make it hard for me."

"I shall leave you entirely to the dictates of your own conscience," said Bransby, pompously, moving off with measured steps. In reality, he was physically dizzy with the sudden violent anger which had grasped him, when he realized that the docile creature of ten

years' submission had turned suddenly and opposed her will to his. He was too bewildered to think of any immediate means of coercion, but his whole sluggish obstinacy was hardening itself into a barrier to be placed between Eunice and the accomplishment of her desires.

Eunice, in the mean time, not waiting to change her habit, had another horse saddled, and rode off at once to Rosemary, where Martha Ellen met her at the door and led her to Barbara's room.

The two women stood gazing at each other for a moment, very pale, and then Eunice put out her arms and drew Barbara to her, holding her fast and pressing her head against her breast, as she pressed the heads of her children when they were in trouble. That sentence about Lois and Win had gone to her heart's core. Barbara did not sob or utter any word; she only clung fast to Eunice, and every now and then a long-drawn shudder shook her whole body.

At last she said, without lifting her face, "I knew you would come."

Eunice did not answer, but pressed her lips with a sort of eagerness on the bent head. Then she led Barbara to a sofa and made her lie down, kneeling beside her still, with her arms about her neck.

"Oh, Barbara," she whispered after a while, "can't you tell me what it is, dear? Your eyes hurt me; they are so full of pain."

"I am almost afraid to speak," said Barbara, in a whisper; "I don't seem able to think clearly. There is only one thing which rings in my head,—something about 'good the final goal of ill.' Then I want more than anything to do what is noble and brave,—what is my duty. I don't want to consider myself. Of course

one can no more help thinking of one's self under the stabs of such agony than one could help bleeding from a sword-thrust."

"But what is it, dearest? Can't you tell me? It would ease your poor heart. You know I would not criticise,—wouldn't quote texts or axioms to you."

"No, no, indeed! you are the very soul of sympathy. I could never have sent for you unless I had known that. And I want to speak, only I can't seem to think connectedly. And then, too, I don't want to say more than is right,—more than I should say. Oh, Eunice, I want to say the truth, the truth, the truth! But how am I to know that I ought to say it?"

"You can be sure of one thing, Barbara, dearest: I shall not think hard thoughts of any one; life is too sorrowful for us all. I never judge, Barbara. When people do things that seem wrong or mistaken to me, I always say to myself, 'You cannot know what temptation they had, what struggles they endured before yielding.' Nearly every life seems to me to be the grave of some great renunciation."

"Ah, my dear, my dear! you must have been very unhappy yourself to have had such thoughts."

"Yes, I have had sorrows. Perhaps they would not seem great to other people, but I have found them sufficient. I think our trials are generally those that touch our most sensitive points. You know some people find a burn far harder to bear than a cut with a knife. It would be foolish for one who did not think burning intolerable to say of some one else who was shrieking and writhing under such a wound, 'How cowardly! *I* have been burnt; *I* did not make such an ado."

"Dearest Eunice," said Barbara, "we both find

burning an anguish, and we have both been terribly burnt. Isn't it true?"

Eunice pressed her cheek to Barbara's, but said nothing. After a moment Barbara went on, speaking very slowly,—

"You never knew my—my—the man I first married, did you? Well,—I—I loved him with my whole being,—mind, soul, body. Oh, how strange it seems to be lying here in this room and saying such words calmly!"

She felt Eunice's arms tighten about her and heard her draw a deep, catching breath. "And—and—I loved the man who is—who is—— Oh, Eunice! I do love Jock!"

"My dear one, I know you do."

"I even thought I loved him more. He seemed to me stronger, more powerful, more splendid. Some wonderful vitality about him dazzled me. I was bewildered. I had great struggles, but, in the end, he made my—the—the other, seem pale, vague. Even then I suffered horribly. I was tormented by dreadful thoughts. I was like a mad woman. I was so cruel. I thought only of myself. And I sent him away."

"My poor dear," whispered Eunice. "Wait a little while. You are trembling so."

"No, darling: let me finish. I must say it all out to you now. Where was I? Ah! I sent him away. And then how lonely I was, how wretched for two years! I went over and over my cruelty and selfishness, until I seemed the most wayward, undisciplined, hopeless creature on earth. I longed to atone for my cruelty, and yet I was afraid. I felt that I loved him, and yet I was afraid to call it love. And then, all of a sudden, one day, he came back. I scarcely know

how I felt at first. His old power over me returned, but I was afraid. Something about him frightened me. I felt that he could be very cruel. I had suffered so much. I shrank from more pain. But he was lovely. So kind, so gentle, so full of care for me. Oh, Eunice, I was a coward! I was so sad, so lonely! This love came to me like a warm cloak to one who is slowly freezing out in the dark. There was no one to tell me that we can love our highest loves but once—that the truest strength in a man is always gentle—that the noblest men are womanly too, just as the noblest women are manly. Because he mastered me, dominated me, I thought he was greater than—than the one I first loved. And so—I married him." She paused, and Eunice shivered. Somehow this last sentence fell as awfully on her ear as the deep sound of the first clod that strikes a lowered coffin.

"I married him," went on Barbara, after a few moments. "And then—and then——" She stammered and hid her face with her hands. Suddenly she took them away. "Oh, Eunice," she whispered, "how much easier it is to bear the loss of a great joy than the presence of a galling burden! Do all women have to learn what real love is, I wonder, by finding out its opposite? Heart-thirst is so much more terrible than heart-hunger."

"Oh, my dear, yes, yes!" said Eunice, with a sort of sob.

"Sometimes," Barbara hurried on,—"sometimes it seems as if I must go mad; as if I could not bear it at all,—the terrible bewilderment of different feelings tearing and tugging at each other. I find myself thinking of Val, longing for him. And then I come to myself with a start of terror. I remember that I have for-

feited my right to think of him. Do you understand the full horror of that thought? Do you? Do you? If I had not loved him as a wife should love it would be different; but I did. I loved him perfectly in every way. He seemed to know my thoughts before I spoke, as I knew his. When we had been silent we used nearly always to begin speaking of the same subject. He was always gentle. I suppose that Jock would have thought him very weak. I try to go to my Bible for comfort, and I see such terrible things. This morning I came upon what Christ said to the woman who had had five husbands. There can never be but one real holy marriage. I cannot think how I was so foolish, so blind, as to think that after such a perfect union as mine I could find another. But I did not send for you to complain. What I want is to know my duty and then to try to do it. It is not any social law that will keep me to this bond which I have taken upon myself. I would never care for any merely conventional restraint. What holds me is the fact of Jock's love for me. I will never do anything to bring myself peace at the price of a fellow-creature's misery. Besides, I do love him,—dearly, dearly. It is only the awful suddenness of it. He can be so horribly cruel. My soul cowers sometimes under his words like a dog that has been often beaten. Sometimes he seems to hate me, to be possessed of some evil spirit."

"Perhaps he feels instinctively that you do not love him as you have loved another," said Eunice in a low voice. "That would madden a passionate, imperious nature. Perhaps he thinks you cold to him."

"But I am only cold to him after some dreadful scene. Then I cannot help it. How could one respond to passionate love just after passionate abuse?

I do try, but it is like the reflection of a torch in ice."

"I know how hard—how hard it is," said Eunice. "Sometimes it seems as though one would welcome the harsh, frigid embrace of the Jungfrau in contrast, doesn't it?"

"My poor Eunice! Have you felt that, too?"

"Marriage teaches one very varied emotions," said Eunice, with that almost phlegmatic bitterness which Barbara had noticed before. "I think it is the hardest and the deepest lesson that life holds for us."

"And what do you think the lesson is?" asked Barbara, eagerly.

"To be great-minded in spite of the littleness of others, to conquer one's self, to develop one's higher nature, to forgive always, to ask for forgiveness, to be taught with briers and not to cry out, to learn more and more how to love without judging, and to believe that God is all love, and that, therefore, justice can have no part in Him. But, Barbara, dear, dear Barbara, you must remember that all this has come to me through years of dreary striving. Such words must seem so chill, so unmeaning to you, in all the fiery freshness of your pain. It seems almost as though one were to offer a bit of court-plaster to a poor creature who was being sawn asunder. I know how you suffer, poor child, poor child! And there is not any real comfort that any one can give just at first. But the hottest flames die into ashes if we have patience; and I think we are given our one great opportunity when we are called on to suffer as you are suffering now. And then, oh, my child, he loves you! Say that over and over to yourself. After all he loves you with a great, ardent, consuming love. He is not tepid, or cold, or self-

righteous. He is a man in every fibre. I have seen that in the few glimpses I have caught of him. He has terrible, terrible faults; but they are outside; they are excrescences which may be cut off. Some natures are like bits of poor marble: the little thin dark vein runs through and through. One may chip and chip until the brittle stuff lies all about one, but still the stain is there to the very core. I sometimes think that with strong characters nearly all things are possible. With too much material one can cut away, can modify; but with too little what can even God do but strain the poor stuff to its greatest compass; and then how thin, how flimsy it looks after all! I think that a noble, high-natured, unselfish woman married to a vigorous man of generous impulses, can make almost anything of him that she desires,—no matter what his faults of impulse and temper are, no matter how much of the brute, the Pan, there may be kneaded in with those energetic forces that make up most genuine men. It is what you have so often said to me, 'The woman-soul leads us upward and on;' and there is no woman-soul that can lead a man so high, so far, as the soul of the woman who has become his wife."

Barbara drew a deep breath and pressed her face close to Eunice's breast.

"You do comfort me,—you do comfort me," she murmured. "You put into words what my heart is struggling to define, and you make me feel how *with* me you are,—just a dear sister who has suffered too, and who is trying to help me to the place of calm where she stands. One feels that your God is a God of great, broad, sheltering wings,—not a sort of Jewish Jove waiting to hurl down wrath and retribution at the first offence. Sometimes, Eunice, I think that if I were a great painter I

should represent Christ carrying a little goat in his arms. When I think of Him I cannot help feeling that humanity is divine rather than that divinity is human. Somehow the conventional idea of heaven horrified me even as a child. I remember how I used to shock grandmamma by saying that I would ask God to give me a country place, and not make me live in the New Jerusalem! And this year, in reading one of Henly's poems, I came upon the self-same thought. Then I had another theory which comforted me. I used to imagine that if I tried with all my might to be good I would live a new and higher life, but still a human life, on every star in space before I reached the orthodox heaven. I always had such a vigorous love of human nature. It seemed to me that most religions were striving to reduce matter, and even God, to what they believed in, as original chaos. It used to madden me when grandmamma tried to make me call myself a poor worm. Somehow I felt that it was insulting the God whose visible thought I was. And oh! Val understood me so perfectly, while Jock thinks me so wild and unbridled in my views! Somehow, he seems changed in every way since our marriage. I don't seem to be able to make him happy, even when I try the hardest. Do you care for Plato, Eunice? Sometimes he soothes and lifts me up as no one else does. I read something this morning that agrees so exactly with what you have been saying to me. Wait a minute; let me get the book. Here it is. Listen. Isn't this wonderful?

"'Honor the soul. Truth is the beginning of all good; and the greatest of all evils is self-love; and the worst penalty of evil-doing is to grow into likeness with the bad. For each man's soul changes, according to the nature of his deeds, for better or for worse.'"

"Ah, yes," said Eunice, her eyes bright and blue as flame, "that is it! 'The greatest of all evils is self-love.' Barbara, darling, I know you do not think I have been preaching at you. I think you absolutely unselfish at heart. Such selfish things as you have done have been through ignorance, not through wilfulness. You have such a gentle, big, loving heart, it cannot lead you wrong. I feel that. Indeed, I know it. You will grow into a sort of dear Titaness of goodness. Oh, Barbara, Barbara! after all, to do what our hand findeth to do with all our might, to love and help others, to grow as perfect as we can through suffering,—that is the greatest of all. And then to find love and sympathy when one has given up expecting them! I, too, have always dreamed of a friendship such as ours; I, too, have always felt that there could be a woman-friendship equal to any that has ever been between men. I am shy, I have the habit of reserve, I feel that I express myself so coldly; but I do love you, Barbara. I will be true to you through everything. You can trust me. I will never change." Tears were running down her cheeks as she finished speaking, and Barbara's face was also wet. They kissed each other solemnly, and sat for a while with hands clasped, their cheeks pressed close together.

"You will believe in me, then, Eunice?" said Barbara, presently; "you will believe that I am going to try with all my strength? When I make blunders and fail in what I try to do, you will forgive me?"

"Dearest, we will forgive each other always!" cried Eunice, touched by the sorrowful humility in her friend's voice.

"I know how trying I must be," continued Barbara, "I have such aggravating faults. But, oh!"—she

broke off, and a smile rippled suddenly over her face—"sometimes, when one is in a certain mood, and one's husband becomes rather boisterously affectionate, it is as if one were famished and longing for iced sherbet and a broiled partridge were offered one instead!"

"Or a bit of stale bread," said Eunice, dryly.

"And yet, dear," went on Barbara, "we are not the bloodless creatures that we are generally thought to be. Did you ever notice how, when a woman is considered very ardent, she is thought to be an exception to the general rule? Men are fond of saying that we cannot keep a secret; and yet, when I think how well we have hidden that fact for ages, until even scientists speak of us as lacking in fire, I cannot help smiling at the popular belief! We are trained to be hypocrites. We are trained to regard all healthy, natural, vivid impulses as unrefined, unfeminine, immodest. A girl likes even her lover to fancy that she yields unwillingly to his kisses. Oh, if I had a daughter, I would teach her that passion in love, in religion, in friendship, in patriotism, is a great, pure fire created by God, and not to be scorned by man! That a woman who errs through love is a nobler creature than her sister who marries for convenience; that true modesty regards all natural impulses as clean; and that it is only immodesty which could turn away with a blush from the grand nakedness of the Milo! I love to think that Christ's first miracle was at a marriage. You know I was speaking of Plato just now. Did you ever think that Christ was the only philosopher who honored the human body and soul equally? Plato would cultivate the soul always at the expense of the body; the Epicureans the body at the expense of the soul; but Christ fitted the broken arc together and declared it to be divine. When I think

of the people who criticise love in all its aspects, it seems to me something like this. There is a great red rose growing in rich soil. One comes by and says, 'What lovely form! What exquisite perfume! But there is something in the color that shocks me! It is too violent! Too blood-like!' Another says, 'The color and form are beautiful, but what a pity that it has to grow in that ugly black earth!' Then comes a poet or a woman who really loves, and says, 'How perfect in every way! And how much we learn when we think that out of the loving darkness of the dust this flower has drawn such living beauty!'"

"Oh, Barbara, Barbara, Barbara!" breathed Eunice. Her face was glowing, her eyes of a violet darkness. "How could you help making any man happy with such ideas of love and life? You seem to open windows in one's soul and let in great strains of music. I never used to be ashamed of feeling. I was not naturally a hypocrite. But—but——" She broke off suddenly and went over to the fireplace. Barbara did not follow her, but sat quite still, her large eyes full of a tender comprehension.

"Sometimes when—when I was first married," continued Eunice, her face still turned away, "I used to stretch out my arms, when I lay awake at night with Godfrey asleep beside me, and I used to think, 'It is like being crucified. This is my cross I am lying on.' When Win came I was afraid that I was going to worship her. Oh, how I loved her! how I doted on her! You will be happier when you have a child, Barbara."

"Do you think so?" said Barbara, dreamily. "I have thought of that so often. But, then, if he were to be harsh to it, or if it were to look at me with unloving eyes?"

"Yes, those doubts are natural," answered Eunice. "Godfrey has a sister who seems terrible to me. Her name is Lydia, and she believes in a hell of actual fire. She thinks any great feeling is a sin, and sometimes her eyes seem dreadful, so large and cruel! Her hair curls like snakes. She has a cruel, beautiful nose. Her mouth is dreadful, too,—so flat, so pale. I used to fear that Win might look like her, might be like her, but you see how different she is in every way. She is the joy of my life. I shall pray for you to have a sweet little girl, Barbara darling."

"I—I am afraid," whispered Barbara, timidly. "Not of the physical pain," she hastened to add, noting the surprised look in Eunice's clear eyes; "only of the added sorrow that it might be. But, whatever comes, I shall try to think of Jock before myself, and to keep true to my own ideal. And in heaven—in some other world—somewhere—some time.—You do believe, do you not?" She did not complete these incoherent sentences, but stood gazing at Eunice through thick-gathering tears, her hands clasped against her breast in the ardent gesture peculiar to her.

"Dear heart, I do, I do!" said Eunice. "There are some lines of Browning that always comfort me. I will say them to you." And with her arm about Barbara she repeated the grand words in her quiet voice,—

"There shall never be one lost good! What was shall live as before.
The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound.
What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more.
On the earth the broken arcs: in the heaven the perfect round."

"Ah, that rouses! That is as stirring as a trumpet-call to hope!" cried Barbara. "Dear, blessed Eunice,

I will remember those lines and your strong, comforting words to me this afternoon whenever I am tempted to be wretched and disheartened."

"Thank God I have been able to help you!" answered Eunice, brokenly. "Remember I shall be always the same."

"And I," said Barbara. "God bless you and keep you."

They kissed each other again, and then Eunice rode home in the purpling twilight.

XVII.

BARBARA'S child was born on a gray, chill day in October, a year after their marriage. She had been very ill. Her first unconscious cry of agony had sent Dering dashing out into the still gloom of the frozen night, his hands to his ears, his heart nearly suffocating him.

His suffering during the next hours was only a continuation of what he had been enduring for several months. A savage, deep, unconquerable jealousy of the unborn child had been growing and festering in his heart ever since he knew of its coming. He pictured Barbara to himself lavishing upon it the passionate devotion which for a long while he felt that he had failed to arouse in her. He tortured himself with all sorts of improbable yet possible conjectures. He had never admitted it to himself, and yet it was Valentine Pomfret's shadow that he felt between himself and Barbara. What if this child were to develop mental traits that would be an eternal reminder of Barbara's

first marriage? Could he help hating it? He clinched his teeth in his effort to force down a rising desire. He had almost wished that it would die at its birth,—at least it would only mean another complication, another barrier, another source of endless discussion. When poor Barbara tried to speak to him of the future he wounded her with his brusqueness. He would turn the subject at once; sometimes with a jest that shocked her, sometimes with a coldness that brought stinging tears. He became silent, morbid, almost a monomaniac on the subject. It was scarcely ever out of his mind. When he woke in the night it haunted him. It was his first thought in the morning; and yet he never alluded to it of his own accord. He imagined every sort of future complication. If it were a boy, it would grow up to disappoint them, to make a fool of itself at college, to squander money, to become a "sport" and a "noodle" and jeer at his ideas of guiding humanity into higher places and mitigating the world-suffering. As a daughter, he saw it vain, frivolous, headstrong, pert, and pretty,—always with Valentine's gentle, irritating ways, the mere memory of which scraped along his nerves like a fine comb through tangled hair.

As he walked back and forth over the ice-stiff grass, he became aware, with a great, engulfing amazement, that he wished to pray, but doubted whether it would do much good after all. His faith had never had the supreme test before: he felt the great fabric give and strain as rising passions tore at it with almost equal force. Somehow until to-night he had felt that God was with him personally, approvingly. Now he began to question the system of the universe under that vehement rebellion at the idea of losing the one treas-

ure which more than any other emotion can shake the human heart to its centre.

Only the day before he had spoken harsh, unloving words to her. He had seen her great eyes slowly brim with tears under his tone and manner, and they had vexed him. There was no doubt of her suffering now. Even as he thought, another of those wailing cries that he so dreaded thrilled to him through the bitter air and brought out a fine beading on his uncovered forehead. He put his arms about a tree, near which he stood, and grasped it as though it had been some living thing which could save him from his own terror and self-reproach. Her dog came snuffing about his feet. He looked upward through the floating, inky foliage of the tree whose trunk he clasped. Her face seemed burnt on the night wherever he turned. The scene of their first meeting came back to him as though it had been yesterday. After all, was there another woman like her on earth? Women more faultless certainly, more submissive, more willing to accept the popular idea of life, with whom domestic existence would be more tranquil, whose views on vital questions would be less disturbing—but one just like her? Never! Even with her faults, would he wish her to change in any essential quality?

"Oh, my God! my dear God!" he broke forth suddenly. "Let her live! Let her love me! Let me teach her to love me! Show me how to be what she would like! Help us to understand each other! Help her! Help her! Save her from this horrible torture!"

He could hear his teeth clacking together as he stopped speaking. It struck him as being grimly droll, and he gave a sort of mirthless laugh. A tide of memory began to sweep over him as though he were

drowning. He held her in his arms. He kissed her wonderful mouth. She loved him. She pressed him to her, and gazed up at him with the old love-look. Then with a start he came to himself again. She was lying in her pretty room up-stairs in mortal pain. Perhaps she was dying.

"If you will let her live, I will be so good! I will be so good!" he heard himself stammering. It seemed to him that hours had passed. Then he could stand it no longer and went back to the house. He wandered into every room which held a tender memory of her, and at last threw himself on the divan in the music-room, his face buried in the cushions which held the subtle perfume of her hair.

It was Eunice Bransby who came and stooped over him, putting her hand very gently on his shoulder.

"It's all right," she said, smiling, but very pale. "You have a little daughter."

He stared at her so crazily out of a face white and drawn almost past recognition, that she took his hand in both hers before repeating,—

"It's all right. Barbara is safe."

Dering struggled terribly for a moment, then dropped his face again into the tumbled cushions and broke into that harsh, agonized sobbing which comes to some men only once or twice in a lifetime.

XVIII.

Barbara was not one of those women whose exuberance of maternal instinct leads them to caress every baby of average comeliness and cleanliness whom they

may chance to meet. Her nature was maternal certainly, but in the broadest sense of the word. She yearned over all living things with that impartiality of true motherliness which will nurse a wounded hawk as tenderly as the broken-winged bird which it has sought to kill. Her term of expectancy had not been cheered with those ecstatic dreams which brighten the waiting of most young mothers. At times she even dreaded the coming of her child, and imagined that it would be cold and uncongenial and given to criticise her, as it grew older; but she depended a great deal on the maternal instinct which was supposed to arrive with all children, and which she thought would bring her a portion at least of the triumphant buoyancy which women were said to feel on such occasions.

When the little warm, fragrant flannel bundle was laid beside her, however, she only experienced a vague sense of unreality, mingled with a faint revulsion at what, in her weak state, seemed to her the generally unnatural aspect of life at that moment. In her heart she wished that they would take it away and not let her see it until it got more attractive and human looking, and then, as scalding tears slowly forced themselves between her closed lids, wondered if she would have felt more loving to it if Jock had been kinder to her before its birth.

He was not allowed to see her for several hours after Eunice had come to him with the news that he had a daughter. When he entered the room he was confronted by the great bed, which looked to him as broad and white as a roof covered with new-fallen snow. Barbara lay pale and quiet, her eyes wide, her rich hair smoothed out on either side of her face. The delicately-pointed ruffles of her thin night-gown only

accentuated the clear whiteness of her face. Her lips were parted and of a dry, deep crimson. She did not smile when she saw him. Her eyes seemed looking past him and not at him. He felt himself shuddering, and glanced nervously about. They were alone. He knelt beside her very cautiously, ventured to take one of her pale hands and drew it to him.

"Forgive me,—forgive me, Barbara,—my poor, beautiful Barbara! How you have suffered!—and I,—I too! I have been in hell. But you will forgive me. You always forgive me. We will conquer life yet, my darling, my darling! How I adore you! You are my saint now! You have been martyred, and for me! You have borne all this for me! But say you forgive me. Let me hear you say it."

"I say it," answered Barbara, in a dull, slow voice.

"Oh, Barbara! Do you mean it, when you say it like that? I cannot think that you really mean it. Do you, my own, my life's blood?"

"I mean it," she repeated in the same voice.

Her eyes stared at him, but, alas, past him, over his head. Dering gave a desperate, uncontrollable sob.

"Oh, God!" he whispered. "Don't you love me any more, Barbara? Is it over? Have I killed your love?"

"Oh, no!" said Barbara, in a school-girl tone, as though she had the words by rote. Then she began to chant them in a sort of sing-song, "Oh, no! Oh, no!"

Dering gazed at her for a moment and saw that she was wandering. He left the room and went out into the moist, windy dawn. The past year seemed to stand clearly before him, each month numbered in order. They had been married in October. In November their disputes had begun. December had seen them bitterly angered against each other. January was

worse. February still more terrible. He broke away, with an angry gesture, from his own reminiscences, and walking briskly onward, his head down, began to examine himself, his conduct, his attitude towards the woman whom he had married. He had never forced himself upon her, never insisted upon any caress which she had not been in the mood to bestow. His conscience was clear on that point. On the other hand, he had given way to utter harshness against her,—he had laughed at what he had chosen to call her "feminine idiosyncrasies." He had disregarded her shy hints about gentleness and tenderness in married love-making. He had, in a word, made himself in every particular a splendid foil for a dead and consequently idealized husband. He ground his teeth as this thought gripped him, but then remembered that the only child she had ever borne was his, and trembled in the realization, his set features relaxing. The fact of their failure to make one another happy baffled him. Their mutual trust was entire. He knew that, no matter what state of irritation might beset them, they were proof against all ignoble jealousies and suspicions. He knew her absolute purity too thoroughly ever to let a doubt of her cross his mind, and he was convinced that she yielded him a like confidence. If he was ever jealous, it was of the ghost of a former love. He had a desperate sense sometimes of struggling with phantom shapes which eluded him, yet remained as real while as intangible as the air he breathed.

Then all at once he was overwhelmed with a sense of what she had suffered physically because of him. The idea of that precious body racked with slow and terrible torture seemed to cripple his own limbs. He leaned against the rough rails of a snake-fence, and,

pressing his forehead against his arms, gave a bitter moan of bewildered unhappiness.

Life seemed very pointless and harsh to him just then. He found it in him to pity the poor little scrap of humanity which might have cost his idol her life. In the natural order of things she would some day have to suffer for another being the very anguish which had given her life.

He told himself that the day of miracles had past, and yet found that he hoped for some miracle which would change the iron monotony of his pain; and then he was strongly tempted to give his strained nerves their way and laugh aloud long, boisterously. How absurd it all seemed! He had thought that the world was his oyster! And he was not even able to conquer his own wretchedness, much less that of others!

Barbara was very ill for some time after that first visit, but at last she was stronger, and one day sent for him to come to her, as she lay wrapped in a delicate pink dressing-gown, which reflected up on her pale face and gave her the semblance of an April bloom. She held out her hands to him as he entered, and he noticed that her rings were loose for her. Something in this trivial fact touched him deeply. He quickened his steps, and, throwing himself on his knees beside her, gathered her to his breast. She lay with great tears blotting her sight, one hand gently caressing his curls. Both felt that wondrous nearness which only a past and mutual pain can bring.

"How strange! how strange it all seems!" she whispered finally, and when Dering lifted his head she saw that his eyes, too, had been hot with tears.

"It is good to suffer," she said, smiling. "It brings such peace."

"I thought that you would never love me again," returned Dering, with a sort of sob.

"Dear Jock! We have both so much to forgive and forget."

"Oh, no! You mustn't say that, Barbara. You have so much more to forgive than I have."

"Perhaps you mean it is harder for me, because I am a woman."

"Yes, I think that is what I meant. My dearest! How lovely you look!"

"But so horridly pale, dear."

"I love you pale. I told you that once before, didn't I?"

"Yes; I thought you only said it to be nice."

"I'm not much given to that sort of thing."

They both laughed, then Dering said, flushing and looking rather conscious,—

"And the—the—it,—where is it, Barbara?"

"Oh, it!" replied Barbara, and blushed too. Then she assumed a serious look, and said, "I'll send for it, —her, I mean. But haven't you seen her, while I've been ill?"

"No. I didn't want to," said Dering, grimly. "Your friend, Mrs. Bransby, thought I was an odious savage, I know. But you were so ill,—I should have hated it if you had died, and so I refused to look at it. Do you think me a monster, darling?"

"No. I—I—love you for it," said Barbara, shyly. "Only you couldn't have hated it really, you know. It's a very dear baby. Now please don't laugh! It is, I assure you. Wait until you see it. Ah! here it—she is, I mean. Now give it to me, Aunt Polly. There, look at it, Jock. It isn't red at all."

"Why, that's a fact!" exclaimed Dering. "The

rogue! How it scowls! It's got a devil of a temper; hasn't it, Aunt Polly?"

"Hit's right fractious, marster," admitted Aunt Polly, honestly.

"Why, it's downright pretty!" exclaimed Dering, after a moment more of absorbed scrutiny. "It's got eyebrows. I never heard of a baby with eyebrows. And such a lot of hair,—curly at the ends, too! What a pretty rascal! I should like to hold it May I?"

"Don't you think you might—er—twist it?" asked Barbara, nervously. "I don't quite like to handle it myself. You've no idea how—how india-rubbery it is, Jock."

"But then it's a small you, Bab dearest."

"How funny! You never called me 'Bab' before!"

"No; but it's a dear little name, isn't it? What is this minx to be called?"

"Not Barbara!—that is, if you don't mind. My mother's name was Fairfax, — Katherine Fairfax. Would you mind Fairfax Eunice? I like our Virginia way of giving girls family names, don't you?"

"Hullo! she's laughing. She likes it, too!" exclaimed Dering. "What pitfalls of dimples! She's a perfect dear! Does your name please you, Lady Fair?"

He turned and clasped Barbara and the child with sudden vehemence.

"You're all mine,—both of you!" he said, with a sort of exulting gayety. Then he turned Barbara's face so that he could look at her eyes. "You feel that you are more mine now than you have ever been another's?" he asked, in the deep voice that with him always meant great emotion.

"Yes," she said, solemnly.

He rested his lips upon her forehead in a long kiss,

and they remained motionless with the sleeping child between them, as though afraid of breaking some blissful spell. Afterwards, when little Fair had been taken away and they sat holding each other's hands and looking out into the pearly twilight, Dering drew a great catching sigh and burst forth,—

"How terrible I have been to you, my poor dear! I'm afraid I'm an infernal savage. Love makes me actually cruel sometimes."

"But then I have tried you dreadfully," said Barbara. "Don't let us speak of those fearful times now. They are over, over, over."

"Yes, forever," said Dering, positively.

"*Unberufen!*" Barbara could not help exclaiming, and added three warning taps on the window-sill, while they both laughed together. During those moments of happy gayety Dering forgot the jealous doubts which had poisoned the last few months for him. It was as impossible to call up past suffering in this intense present as it is to imagine one melody while listening to the actual chords that compose another. Then, too, as far as physical semblance went, the child was, as he had said, a small Barbara, with no suggestion of either himself or Valentine in its clear face. His nature had undergone one of those quick changes which transformed him, often without warning, into a different being. He was all gentleness and sunshine. Barbara could not help asking herself if she had not imagined much of the past anguish. Could the man who stroked her hair so tenderly, who closed her lids with the gentlest kisses, who spoke to her with such delicate love-phrases, could he ever really have glared at her with furious eyes, pushed her from him with harsh roughness?

The mere memory sent a cold trickle of revulsion through the sweet warmth of her mood. She gave a little shiver, and then, with a swift movement as though appealing to him for protection from some terrifying presence, clung to him and pressed her face against his breast. He held her fast with broken words of love and comfort, feeing in her sudden gesture only the nervousness that comes after any intense strain of mind or body, and realizing with a moved surprise that she was dearer to him than she had ever been as sweetheart or newly-married wife.

XIX.

Some weeks later Barbara found herself walking through the rolling meadows that separated Rosemary from The Poplars. She was alone, except for the dogs, as Dering had been called unexpectedly to New York, and her mood was one of exultant freedom. Nothing seemed to her more impossible than that the child which she had left rosily sleeping was her flesh and blood, actually a part of her being, spiritual and physical, who would one day progress unto calling her "Mother." She laughed as she ran along with her hand on her deerhound's collar.

The day seemed a gray globe of whirling wind. Overhead the sky was streaked with flying feathers of cloud, driven in all directions by the opposite air-currents. The broom fields swept against the rich violet of the hills in overlapping billows of pale rose-yellow, gray-white, of straw-color, of rich burnt-orange. Here and there the faint-red curve of a path was beaten out

along a slope, upon which the tawny growth rippled in the sheets of wind.

Barbara had a love of the open fields equal to that which she felt for the ocean. She would always cross them in preference to keeping the road, scrambling over fences and through patches of bramble and underbrush to attain her end, and finding her reward in the friendly solitude which she loved, the whirr of startled birds, the close darting of small creatures whose homes were in the tussocks of wild grass and broom disturbed by her venturous feet. It seemed to her that she possessed her own soul more completely during these companionless walks, and she was learning to look forward to them as a means of developing a certain new growth of mentality of which she had begun to be conscious during the past months. Hers was a being which responded generously to the teaching of sorrow, which was never hardened by it, but lent itself to that powerful moulding with the plastic readiness characteristic of large natures. Even in her past waywardness and egoism there had always been a distinct vein of humility which made her willing to accuse herself of wrongdoing on the least occasion, and by which she had often been led to misrepresent herself to others through the excessive harshness of her self-criticism. It was in this spirit that she now accepted the pain which had come to her through her marriage with Dering. She told herself that she had been exacting, inconsiderate, almost wilfully trying, for in the first shock of disappointment she had given herself up to a sense of hopelessness, which found its only relief in an attitude of minute criticism, and made of their daily intercourse a sort of magnifying-glass to classify his detailed failures of tact and responsiveness. She had married him

with the idea of atoning to him for her former cruelty, and she had ended by allowing herself to be overwhelmed at the lack of that very joy which she had decided to be impossible of attainment by most people, and certainly not twice to be received by any one.

As she walked rapidly along through the soft December wind, she began thinking of her life as a novel in three volumes. Her marriage with Valentine had been the first, ending with his death; her meeting with Dering and the first year of her life with him the second, which had been closed by the birth of their child; while now she stood as it were in the first chapter of the third, wondering what it would unfold; and she quickened her steps in a rush of sudden determination which seemed to force onward her body as well as her mind.

The mother-sense had begun to stir in Barbara with a certain bird-like quality which lent itself to wide-winging thoughts. She had not experienced any peculiar ecstasy in the mere bodily beauty of her child, who was very exquisite, but as the strange, quiet gray eyes gazed up at her from her knee with that steadfast seriousness of babyhood, she was thrilled by a solemn and exalted sense of the spiritual individuality which made this small creature different from all others and invested her with that dignity of isolated consciousness which we call life. During her hours of deep reflection she was visited by those ineffable visions full of the holiness of spiritual light, which come to us when pondering how we may work the good of others, and help to supreme beauty some soul which has been knit to ours through love.

She longed to speak of these new and vast yearnings to some one who would comprehend that they were

not merely the outbursts of a young mother over her first baby. She knew that Dering was not in touch with her here. By some acute instinct developed through repeated suffering of the same kind, she felt that he would resent her mental absorption in another, even though it were his own child, and was careful not to make the baby the subject of discussion unless he first alluded to her. This repression, which she had practised conscientiously, made her doubly anxious to see Eunice, who had been obliged to leave for Florida the day after Fair's birth on account of the illness of Bransby's sister. Indeed, her craving to be with this wonderful friend amounted to keen mental hunger, and by the time that the gray, vine-laced walls of The Poplars gleamed through the purplish tracery of the trees upon the oval lawn she found that she was almost running, in her eagerness of anticipation.

As she walked towards the house over the bleached grasses, she saw that the wide doors of iron-bound oak were open, and that outlined against the ruddy square of the hall fireplace a tall figure, heavy with crape, was standing in an attitude of repellent erectness.

Barbara at once guessed this to be Mrs. Crosdill, the sister of Bransby, who, as Eunice had written, would probably return with her to Virginia. Although she was not near enough to distinguish the stranger's features, a sense of antagonism possessed her and made her hesitate for a moment. Before she could exactly realize the emotion which had chilled her, however, Winifred came darting across the lawn, her floss of dark-brown curls spinning hatless in the wind, her clear, alert little face one sparkle of delight.

"Oh, you dear! you dear! you dear!" she cried, dancing about Barbara in a sort of frenzy. "Oh, I

do feel really religious 'bout your coming! It makes me b'lieve in prayer, 'cause I *did* pray so hard you'd come! You can't think how horrid and—and sort of fungusy she makes things. The whole hall smells of her dreadful crape. And she's worse than papa 'bout Sunday, and has such a graveyardy way of talking."

"Hush! You must hush, Win!" said Barbara, giving her a soft pinch of warning. "I suppose by 'she' you mean your aunt, and she's coming towards us."

"Oh, dem!" groaned Win.

Barbara was nearly startled into one of her ringing laughs, but managed to repress it and assume a severe air.

"My child! What a horrid word! Where did you hear it?"

"Why, it's what that Mantalini man says, Barbara, dear. I thought everybody knew that. It isn't any harm when you crook your finger for quotation-marks, —and I'm going to say it to Aunt Lydia some day. I am!" she ended, looking stubborn, as Barbara shook her head.

Mrs. Crosdill here reached them, and, before speaking to Barbara said, in a cold voice of admonishment,—

"Winifred, I am sure that your father would be displeased to see you in this high wind without a hat. Go and fetch Lois's if you can't find your own."

"Oh, *mother* wouldn't care!" responded Win, airily, accentuating this word with a provoking inflection: "and this is mother's dearest friend, Mrs. Dering. Why don't you speak to her and tell her to come in?"

A faint purplish flush streaked Mrs. Crosdill's cheeks. Her mouth had a thin wideness and her eyes a round brilliancy which struck Barbara as frog-like. They

looked at each other and felt that mutual aversion which Barbara and Bransby had also experienced at first sight. Mrs. Crosdill said, formally,—

"I am sorry, but neither my brother nor Eunice is at home to-day. Will you come in? You must be cold. I should think it was too windy for walking."

"Why don't you tell her that mother said she'd be back in an hour?" said Win, vindictively. "She's been gone most an hour now."

"Winifred," said her aunt, eying her vividly, "you are very impertinent. I shall speak to your father."

But Winifred remained unmoved, and hopped along on her slender, black-stockinged legs, feigning an elaborate lameness, with two old weather-beaten croquet-mallets for crutches, and murmuring, coolly,—

"I don't see why you will drag papa in, 'cause you must see he don't bother 'bout us, one way or another."

Again Mrs. Crosdill flushed dimly, but said nothing this time. When they were in the hall, she closed the front doors and rang for tea, then sat down, and under the cover of conventional conversation examined narrowly Barbara's personal appearance, while Winifred flitted from window to window in a state of nervous expectation.

"I can't see why mother takes so long to come back," she cried, finally, rushing towards them in her usual impetuous fashion and flinging her elbows into Barbara's lap, while she grasped her chin with all ten little fingers. "Do you think anything could have happened to her? She's riding Dervish, you know, and he does cut up so."

"Oh, no, I'm sure not, dear," said Barbara, stroking the wild mop of curls.

"Your mother has not been gone more than half an

hour, Winifred," put in Mrs. Crosdill in her measured voice, the mere sound of which seemed to put the nervous child into a state of almost feverish irritation.

"Oh, 'deed I do think she has, Aunt Lydia," she said, rebelliously. "I think it will be too bad if you let Barbara go before she comes back."

"I shall be only too glad for Mrs. Dering to stay. Really, the manners of these nineteenth-century children are lamentable," she added, turning to Barbara, and speaking across Win's tousled head.

The latter flushed a bright rose, drew down her black brows in a scowl, and shot a glance of condensed loathing at Mrs. Crosdill from her dilated gray eyes. Then, after a moment spent in silent consideration, walked away to the other side of the hall and seemed busy with the objects on one of the large tables of carved oak, which were covered with the latest French, English, and American periodicals, several photographs in leather frames, and books of etchings.

"You have been very ill, haven't you?" said Barbara at last, searching about for some topic of common interest.

"Yes; I have been threatened with consumption for two years. I had an attack of rheumatic bronchitis soon after reaching Florida. The same thing Browning died of, you know. My physician says that if they had given him salicylate of soda he would be alive now."

"How dreadful it seems to think of the life of a great genius like that being dependent on a drug!" exclaimed Barbara, and was at once conscious of an icy stream of disapproval which poured into Mrs. Crosdill's polished-looking brown eyes.

"I must say that I never thought of it in that

light," she replied, stiffly. "It was the will of God that Robert Browning should die. If it had not been so, some one would have been inspired to give him salicylate of soda."

"I didn't know that doctors had usually to be inspired before they could write a prescription," said Barbara, angered at what she considered the decided insolence of Mrs. Crosdill's manner.

At this awkward point Winifred shot towards them again, holding in both hands, high over her head, a large photograph, her red mouth pursed malevolently, her eyes two shining streaks of mischief behind their bushy black lashes.

"Do you see this old gentleman, Barbara?" she called out. "He's a bishop, and if Aunt Lydia was a Roman Catholic she'd hang him over her bed and pray to him as they do to the Virgin Mary. Ain't his hair curly? I know he puts it up in papers every night; but, of course, Aunt Lydia wouldn't say so, even if she thought it."

Barbara was aghast at the convulsion of anger which distorted Mrs. Crosdill's face. It grew suffused with blood, the veins in her prominent forehead swelled. She made a fierce, hawk-like pounce and caught the child by the arm, tearing from her the photograph, which she placed on the chair from which she had risen, then lifted her free hand as though to strike. Barbara leaped to her feet determined to interfere, but saw at once that Winifred was fully capable of protecting herself.

"If you touch me," she said, in a low voice, "I'll kill you." And there was something so dangerous in the curious quiet of her tone, that Mrs. Crosdill released her.

"You wicked little creature," she exclaimed. "God will punish you for your blasphemy if your weak and self-indulgent mother does not!"

Winifred looked like a pale flame of fury. "If you dare to say such things of my mother, I'll beg God, night and morning, to punish *you!*" she said, between her sharp little teeth. "If I am wicked, it is you that make me wicked. I could 'most b'lieve God was Hate if I stayed long in the house with you."

"Winifred! Winifred!" said Barbara, but in such a gentle tone and with her arms so tenderly outstretched, that after a second's quivering pause the child darted to her, and, pressing her face against her breast, burst into a wild passion of tears.

Just here Eunice entered. She seemed to comprehend the situation at once, for she said to Barbara, in a low voice,—

"Bring her up to my room, dear." Then, turning to Mrs. Crosdill, added, coldly, "I am very sorry, Lydia, if Win has been naughty to you again. She shall ask your pardon later, if she has been."

"Oh, as for that, she is always insolence itself to me," replied that lady, bitingly.

Eunice left the room without saying anything in response to this gracious speech, followed by Barbara, to whom Win was yet clinging with the wiry tenacity of a desperate kitten.

XX.

After Win had been admonished and disposed of the two friends, left alone, put their arms about each other and remained with their cheeks pressed close for

several moments. Then Barbara said, putting Eunice from her and regarding her with tender gravity,—

"You look thinner, dearest. Has that dreadful woman been wicked to you?"

Eunice shivered a little, pushing back her hair, which had been pressed down about her forehead by her riding-hat.

"She *is* dreadful," she said finally, drawing a long breath. "Sometimes, when I have been alone with her and Godfrey for several weeks, I feel as though I were losing my identity. They make me so unspeakably wretched. They are so narrow,—their views of life are so narrow——" She broke off, and, catching Barbara suddenly to her, kissed her eagerly on cheeks and eyes.

"You are all the real life that I have!" she exclaimed. "When I am with you I seem to feel, to vibrate. Usually I only exist. I have been starved for you, Barbara. Sometimes I have thought that I should die if I did not see you,—and I have suffered! One can go through so much in a few weeks. Such upheavals, such mental earthquakes!" She began to walk up and down, unbuttoning her habit nervously. Barbara followed her, and threw about her the delicate peignoir of faint blue cashmere which she found on the sofa. The white arms and neck had a frail look. Their net-work of lilac veins was too apparent for beauty. When she had thrown herself into an arm-chair, Barbara knelt down before her and drew off the small riding-boots.

"If you ring for your maid, we can't talk," she had exclaimed when Eunice protested, so the latter submitted with a deep sigh of relief. "What cold little feet!" said Barbara, taking one in both hands, and

then holding it against her breast to warm it. "And what feverish eyes! Eunice, darling, what have they been doing to you? Do tell me. You have that look of having been through something written all over your face. Has she—have they—has—has your husband——"

"Hush! hush!" whispered Eunice, half starting up. "Don't speak so loud, Barbara. He doesn't like you as it is. If he heard you say such a thing he would move heaven and earth to separate us."

"A woman-tamer," murmured Barbara, with a contemptuous curl of her arched lips. "Yes, he does hate me. I can feel it whenever I go near him. And she does, too! She strikes me as terrible. There is something like iron about her,—iron sheeted in ice. I can't help believing that these overpious people are hypocrites, Eunice. They are always discovering in others the faults which they have taken such care to conceal in themselves. She gives me a frozen feeling,—that Mrs. Crosdill. And then children have such instincts about people. Look how Win detests her!"

"Yes, both the children dislike her," said Eunice, in a tired voice. "She seems to frighten Lois, and Win is always being disagreeable to her. You can't think how I hate to make the child apologize to her, Barbara, even when it is right. She does take such delight in humiliating people. But you, my dear one! You have told me nothing of yourself and little Fair."

Barbara laughed: "There is nothing much to tell. Fair is very pretty, and I don't yet feel like her mother. I don't realize her. I suppose I shall after a while. I am not a delirious mamma."

Eunice smiled and closed her eyes for a minute or two. As Barbara watched her she became more and

more struck by the other's pallor and great air of weariness. Seating herself suddenly on the arm of the chair, she drew her against her breast and held her there.

"Ah, that is good! that is good!" whispered the poor woman. "You are so human, Barbara. Your heart beats so strong and fast under my cheek I feel as though I were coming to life in your arms like some poor thing taken out of the snow. And yet—I—I have been trying to get dead. I seemed to be coming to life again there in Florida." She leaned her head back on Barbara's shoulder with an abrupt movement and lifted her blue eyes, which had that intense, flame-like radiance that Barbara had noticed once or twice before. "I am going to tell you something, Barbara. I wonder what you will say to me. I have never spoken of such things even to a journal until now. But I am going to tell you everything."

"Yes, my sweetheart; tell me all," answered Barbara, her arms tightening about the slight figure. "You must know that I could only be loving and tender to you no matter what you told me."

Eunice turned her head and kissed the shoulder upon which it rested, then went on speaking, in a quick, even tone: "I have been unhappy ever since I was married——" She broke off, and with a sort of exultation exclaimed, "Oh, God! how good it is to have it out at last! What relief! I felt as though my heart would burst." Barbara went on stroking the dark head with one powerful, fair hand, but said nothing. "That soothes me. Don't stop, Barbara," murmured Eunice; then she went on with what she had been saying: "Yes, I have been very unhappy for eleven years. It's a long time, Barbara."

"Yes, darling, I know."

"I have struggled with myself. I haven't let myself be morbid. I have done my duty,—at least what I saw to be my duty. I have tried not to shirk anything. Do you remember what I said to you about the lesson of marriage? Well, I thought I had mastered that. Perhaps I felt too strong. God wanted to test me. You see I thought I was dead mentally, emotionally. That is where so many women fall into error. They think the ocean has dried up, when it is only the tide that has gone out. Well, there is nothing remarkable or romantic in my little one-sided story, but I—I saw—this winter—in Florida—I met there a man—you see I felt so secure in my coldness, my deadness——" She stopped again, and drew away from Barbara, covering her face with both hands. "I don't know how to say it exactly," she continued, brokenly. "There was nothing. He was only a gentle, understanding, sympathetic friend to me; but he made me see—no, he made me feel—what life could be with—with a nature like his—the light, the warmth, the color,—the touch of soul on soul! There was nothing morbid in what I felt. The terrible struggle was about my attitude to Godfrey. My life with him seemed such a corpse-like mockery. I thought if I could only be free,—could only have my spirit and body to myself. Oh, Barbara, I could be so happy only dreaming of an ideal, even if I never actually possessed it! But as it is, I don't even possess my own personality!" She wrung her hands together with such bitter intensity that one of her rings cut into the flesh and a little drop of blood oozed out from beneath the bright diamonds.

"I am the property of another," she went on, bit-

terly, "and of one who has not the excuse of intense feeling in his tyranny. If I could feel that he loved me,—was jealous even; but no, no! it is not that. He merely wishes to domineer, to compel, to master. I cannot understand it. I cannot understand the man-spirit, Barbara."

"What woman can, my own?" said Barbara, with bitterness. "It is only when a man has something of the woman in him that he can understand us or we comprehend him."

"And then, too, he—my husband—is weak! weak! weak!" exclaimed Eunice. She made a wild gesture with her arms as though breaking some restraint. "Yes, I will say it. He is weak. He is even afraid of me in some things. I can't respect him! I can't respect him!" Her voice was a wail of pain.

"My darling! my darling!" said Barbara, "what misery you have been through! How horribly you must have suffered!"

"Ah, yes!" she cried; "and the worst of it is that to them our suffering has always something ridiculous in it. Not that Godfrey has ever seen me cry. No one has ever seen me like this but you, Barbara. Somehow I seem to have come to the end of my strength. I am like a silly bird that streaks the ceiling with its blood in trying to get out of the room where it is captive. I don't seem to care for anything to-day but my freedom, my freedom, my freedom! I want to be free,—free again! I want to be a girl—free—myself! I haven't been myself for eleven years!"

Barbara felt that her own face was scorched with tears. She could not speak, and pressed her friend's hand to her silent lips. Presently Eunice started to her feet and began moving silently about the room,

her eyes wide and scintillating, her hands wrung energetically together.

"It makes me wild," she said, in an excited whisper. "I think what I have missed, and I feel desperate. It is the lack of patience that is at the bottom of nearly all human misery. If I had been more patient, —not so romantic. I thought that Godfrey was the most ideal of men. I took his silence for wisdom, his narrowness for purity, his coldness for self-control. He is not a man. He is a thing of snow and putty. I could make a *man* love me!"

Barbara stared at her utterly astounded.

She had drawn her slight figure upward in an attitude of triumphant self-confidence, one round fragile arm making an energetic line above her head, the hand clinched, the finger-nails white in their convulsive tension. Her nostrils were dilated, her lips half smiling. She looked strangely young, and, at the same time, there was an air of life-knowledge about her which made her seem thoroughly the woman.

"Yes! I could have made *him* love me,—adore me! It is not only you splendid creatures who know how to rouse feeling and lavish it in return. My life is a waste of snow; but it might have been different! it might have been different!" She paused, burying her face in one of her flowing sleeves and overcome with sudden weeping.

"Eunice," said Barbara, going over beside her, "you helped me so much when I was desperate. Can't I help you now? I have suffered, too. It was you who taught me how to bear it."

"Oh, you! you!" cried Eunice. "What can you really know of what I feel? You have had love—perfect—perfectly returned. It is we poor wretches who

have had nothing to whom the future seems unbearable. I am a woman,—young, pretty; yes, pretty. I have an ardent heart,—a deep need of tenderness, of comprehension, of companionship. I believe in ideal relations between men and women, the sanctity of the marriage bond. I am not afraid of suffering, mental or physical. I have tried all my life to serve God, to do my duty, to exercise self-control, to create a worthy character, and look at me! look at me as I stand here! I am thirty years old and I have never been loved in my life!"

Barbara was very pale.

"I cannot say empty words to you," she whispered at last. "I cannot tell you that there is compensation for such a lack. There is none. But your mood will pass. I have had many like it. It will pass. You will see that there is no use kicking against the pricks. You will come back to your steadfast self,—to your calm, beautiful mastery of life. You are so above it all, Eunice,—and—and—I would give my very life for you, darling!"

Eunice came towards her holding out both hands. She kissed her solemnly on the forehead.

"You are the greatest blessing my life has ever had," she said, in a low voice. "I think it was because, in spite of my barren existence, I believed in great friendship, in affinity of soul with soul, that God sent you to me. Sometimes I have thought that we create God as much as He creates us. If we strongly believe in Him, He exists for us. If we turn from Him with conviction, He ceases to be. I never lost my faith in friendship, and now I have you."

"And you!" cried Barbara. "What are you to me? The very essence of compensation! The realization

of my ideal of a woman's highest feeling for a woman! Ah, Eunice! we are fond of clamoring about the higher education of women, but it is the higher education of men that is needed. We understand them for the most part, and why? Because we individualize, while they generalize. We study one especial man, and so learn to comprehend him and his needs. We say *he* likes this or that, does thus and so,—will need one thing or be angered at another. Men say, '*Women* are *all* like this *one!*' How one longs for a woman Buddha sometimes! It is that feeling of the lack of comprehension in men that has done so much towards creating Mariolatry, I think. Sometimes it does chance that a husband comprehends his wife as an individual being, and then the marriage is genuinely a marriage."

"Ah, Barbara! Barbara!" moaned poor Eunice, putting up her hands as though to ward off some sharp blow. "Don't tell me of the Brownings or Charles Kingsley and his wife! Sometimes I am tempted to think that they only had a double lock on their skeleton's closet, and heard the rattle of his dancing all the same. Is there such a thing as a happy marriage? Do you think so, Barbara? You say your first marriage was perfect, but then it wasn't more than a honeymoon! It lasted such a little while! Perfect marriage means the survival of undisturbed devotion through the daily friction of years. I cannot believe in it. I cannot! I cannot!"

Barbara made no reply, and presently Eunice asked, abruptly, "Do *you* know any happy marriages among your acquaintances, Barbara?"

"I knew one," answered Barbara, sadly,—"a young minister. He was very happy in his marriage. He

had been married six years when his wife died. That was four years ago."

"And he has not married again?" said Eunice, incredulously. Barbara shook her head.

"What a wonderful man!" exclaimed Eunice.

"Yes; I told him so once."

"But he will in time, I suppose," said Eunice, with chill bitterness. "How strange it seems that men and women cannot be satisfied with one complete love, no matter how short a while it lasts!"

Barbara covered her eyes with one hand,—the other was clasped tightly about Eunice's riding-cap, which she had lifted from the floor. A sense of great pain and humiliation was upon her. She felt that Eunice had spoken without thinking, but from her heart. At last she looked up.

"I failed there," she said, gently. "But our own failings bring us so close to others. It seems to me that in noble natures great mistakes are always the stepping-stones to great virtues."

"Yes, yes," murmured Eunice; but her eyes had an absent-minded look. Presently she broke forth again:

"What I have felt from the first is so terrible. It has taken all the poetry—the kindred spirit out of life for me. Sometimes when I have gone to the woods and fields for consolation, the trees seemed to me no more than the glaring canvas in a theatre, the sky like a bit of cloth painted blue with holes punched in it to mimic stars. I was loved with the deliberation of a machine. Only the most vivid and intense love can consecrate the bond of marriage. I was the bride of a wooden puppet, whose love-words flowed forth like sawdust, and who took occasion to explain to me, before our honeymoon was over, that the love between

men and women was, on the whole, a concession to the vulgarity of nature and a thing never to be alluded to even indirectly. How I have loathed it! I longed to kill myself. I questioned God. My body seemed to me a vile, unworthy thing. It was you, you, Barbara, who taught me to see that high passion is a consecration,—that it is only lukewarm sensuality that desecrates." She pushed her thick hair back from her forehead and held it there for a moment or two, then went on:

"I think that if I were to see Win married to one of the average young men of to-day, of whom poor Godfrey has such a horror,—one who is proud of having had his amours, his mistresses, his club-dinners ending in drunkenness,"—she laughed bitterly,—"if I were to see that I should be as bad as a murderess, Barbara. I should pray God to kill him. I should be capable of killing him myself. I would rather see her dead now,—my precious baby, all my own, in her clean little coffin,—than the miserable wife of a creature who had worn off the edge of all feeling in picking the locks of pleasure. Who would tell his wife coarse anecdotes, and get angry when she cried instead of laughing. Who would—— God help me! my brain seems in a fever!" She sank suddenly upon the sofa, her lips white. As Barbara came over beside her she turned upon her a look of piteous appeal. "Life and love and marriage should be so beautiful, Barbara," she said, whispering. "Why is it all so desperately sad?"

"It is because men and women do not understand each other, I think," answered Barbara, "and will not realize that God having made the world pronounced it good. Instead of trying to put ourselves in sympathy with Nature, we flatter ourselves that we can improve

upon her. It seems to me that everything is too much in extremes. Take Tolstoi and Swinburne, for example. One lauds even vice if it has a sensual beauty. The other preaches that even the highest form of passion between men and women is unnatural and should be suppressed as much as possible. We cannot seem to reconcile the two elements. If we could only do that, it seems to me that life would be well worth living."

"Ah, well," said Eunice, with hard deliberation, "I don't think that life could ever seem very well worth living to me again. You see I am married to a man who let me know, before the first year of our marriage had passed, that he considered the most stupid and petty-minded girl above me, merely on account of her maidenhood. It seemed to me, in that moment, that I could be crucified, oh! so willingly, if it could save women from such torture."

Barbara's face grew suddenly radiant. "Eunice, darling, let us live for them!" she exclaimed. "Let us teach Win and Lois and Fair to live for them, too! Oh, if I could only write great poems and books to help them! But, at least, I can live my life, so that those who come in contact with it will be helped and comforted. Let me try to comfort you now, my dear, dear heart. Rest on my great love for you. Think how I honor and respect and comprehend you. As long as we can be to each other what we are life holds sweetness for us. Look how you have helped me to conquer myself,—to realize my duty! I have accepted my lot. I am content. I would not change one circumstance in my fate even if I had the power. It seems to me, dearest, that the most comforting words ever said were, 'All things work together for

good to them that love God.' And more and more I believe that our love for God can only come to Him acceptably through our love for each other. Do not think that you 'have come to the end of your strength.' It is only that, for the moment, you are overstrained. It has been too much for you, these lonely weeks spent with two such alien natures. Really, darling, I should be quite mad if I had had to nurse Mrs. Crosdill through an attack of rheumatic bronchitis. She's terrible enough in comparative health,—but ill! The strain must have been almost unbearable. But now that you have come back to me all will get easier, more natural! We shall have such drives and walks together! Such hours of beautiful companionship! Cheer up, my blessing, and when you feel that your life is objectless and dreary, think of your Barbara, and how you have helped her and are helping her all the time."

As Barbara went on speaking, Eunice's expression grew very wistful and tender. Her blue eyes were soft with tears. Then she framed Barbara's glowing, beautiful face in her thin white hands, and said, in the voice of one who makes a prayer of thanksgiving,—

"My own, dear, great-hearted Barbara, I am so glad when I think of how I loved you and believed in you against all the world!"

XXI.

Eunice was ten minutes late for dinner that evening, and when she came down-stairs Bransby and Mrs. Crosdill were already seated at the table. Bransby

was one of those men who are made profoundly indignant by unpunctuality at meals, and to-day this feeling was accentuated by the knowledge that Barbara Dering was the probable cause of Eunice's tardiness. He looked at her with a disagreeable flattening of the lips as she entered, while his sister continued to push the morsels of food about in her plate with an air of tacit approval of his unspoken words.

"I suppose it was Mrs. Dering whom I heard whistling down the lawn just now like an unmannerly school-boy, although she knows perfectly well that we dine at seven, and that I have a rooted objection to your being late for meals?" These sentences were uttered in a crisp, grating tone that one would use to a naughty child.

"It was not Barbara's fault that I was late," said Eunice, quietly. "I did not feel well. I dressed slowly."

Bransby's disagreeable expression increased.

"Another thing that I have noticed," he observed in his measured voice, "is the air of suppressed, I might say morbid, excitement which you have after one of your *séances* with Mrs. Dering. And I might as well tell you now that she has made exactly the same impression upon Lydia that she made upon me the first moment that I saw her."

"Exactly," observed Mrs. Crosdill, leaning back in her chair and playing with an ostentatiously simple ring of green enamel which she wore above her wedding-ring.

Eunice said nothing in reply to this, but poured herself a glass of sherry.

"You agreed with me about her appearance, too, did you not, Lydia?"

"I thought her an extremely sensual type of a certain vulgar conception of good looks," replied Mrs. Crosdill, briefly. "I detest that dyed-looking hair, and her lips are almost as thick as a negro's; still, I suppose she is undoubtedly what some people would call handsome. You think her handsome, I believe, Eunice?"

Eunice, who was drawing patterns on the damask table-cloth with the point of her knife,—another thing which always roused Bransby's disapproval,—answered rather slowly,—

"To me Mrs. Dering is the most beautiful woman it is possible to imagine."

Mrs. Crosdill gave an indescribable smile, and Bransby exclaimed, rather explosively for him,—

"I must really ask you not to express yourself with such intense exaggeration, my dear Eunice. I should be very much mortified for any of my friends to think Mrs. Dering your ideal of beauty. It smacks of a certain—er—I might say lack of refinement in your nature, which I am sure is not there."

"Perhaps," said his wife, "our ideas of refinement are different."

Bransby flushed and darted a glance at his sister, who responded with a look of pitying sympathy.

"It pains me very much to think that our ideas on any subject so important could possibly be opposed," he said at last, with great stiffness.

Again Eunice made no reply. It seemed to her that she was sitting between two human crabs, each of whom would give her a nip as long as she remained where she was. There was nothing for it but endurance, and she called up all her self-control to help her through what she foresaw would be an almost unen-

durable hour and a half. Bransby waited as though for her answer, and finding that she remained silent, observed, with increasing irritation,—

"I have been intensely displeased to hear that Winifred has again been impertinent to her aunt. If this is not stopped, I shall have to take steps in the matter myself."

"Winifred apologized to you, did she not, Lydia?" said Eunice, coldly, lifting a pair of ice-blue eyes to Mrs. Crosdill's prominent brown ones.

"Yes; but I cannot say that I approve of a system which permits a child to be as insolent as she chooses on the condition that she buys herself off from punishment afterwards by an apology."

"Yes," put in Bransby, "Lydia is absolutely correct. I do not think that you have any ideas of true discipline whatever, my dear Eunice. You are altogether too tender-hearted."

Mrs. Crosdill again turned her green ring, and said, deliberately,—

"What Winifred needs is a good whipping now and then, and afterwards to be shut into a darkened room."

"Yes, that seems to me a very good solution of the problem," agreed Bransby, darting an oblique glance at his wife.

But Eunice did not look at him. She fixed her eyes again upon those of Mrs. Crosdill; the dilated pupils made them seem a dark violet.

"I wish no suggestions from any one about the disciplining of my children," she said, in her clear, exquisitely-modulated voice. "I hope you won't give yourself useless trouble in making any more, Lydia."

"Certainly, if I am not to be allowed to interest myself in my brother's children, I must accept the

alternative, I suppose. You shall not be annoyed further."

But Bransby was now in a tremor of suppressed anger.

"You and I will discuss this matter later, Eunice," he said, in a stifled tone.

Eunice made a quiet movement of assent.

After five minutes of silence Bransby broke out again,—

"The more I see of that woman the more I dislike her. She must certainly have some mysterious power over you, Eunice. Otherwise your feeling for her is inexplicable."

"Hypnotism," suggested Mrs. Crosdill, softly.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed, "I believe you have solved the problem! There has always seemed something unnatural about the whole matter to me. You have really given me new light, my dear Lydia. I am convinced that Mrs. Dering has some hypnotic power over Eunice. How can one possibly account for her infatuation in any other way? She, a woman of delicate breeding, shrinking refinement, almost supersensitive feelings, suddenly to form an intimate friendship, and against my wishes, too, for this showy, hoidenish, forward, exaggerated woman, who wears that low-necked style of dress which is a disgrace to modern civilization, and actually chastises her dogs with her own hands!"

"Oh, Godfrey! Come! I cannot believe that! You must be mistaken about that!" cried his sister, almost giving vent to a judicious shriek of horror.

Eunice's expression, which had first been one of controlled anger, subsided into an air of extreme boredom.

"I can't see why you should both continue to discuss

a subject which seems so painful to you," she said, finally, seeing that they seemed waiting for her to speak, "I am assuredly not going to attempt a defence of Barbara. That I love and respect and admire her with all my heart is a quite sufficient reason to myself for what you choose to think my misplaced friendship."

"I do not consider that at all a becoming way for you to speak to me, Eunice," said her husband, coloring darkly. "However, if you admire Mrs. Dering so intensely, I can understand it, for she treats her husband with unmitigated disrespect on the least occasion."

"She looks like a very self-assertive person," put in Mrs. Crosdill. "There is something very unfeminine about her."

"At least she is not a hypocrite," returned Eunice, always in the same even voice. "I am beginning to think that most very vociferously conventional and pious people are hypocrites. How astonished some of them will be when, as Christ said, they see the publicans and harlots going into heaven before them!"

"Eunice!" cried Bransby. His face had the same convulsed look that his sister's had worn during her fit of anger with Winifred. He was silent a moment, gripping the edge of the table with both hands. Mrs. Crosdill had shrunk back in her chair, and was looking down into her black-crape lap as though faint with wounded modesty.

"That I should live to hear my wife—*my* wife—use such a word!" stammered Bransby at last. "It is horrible!"

"Christ used it," said Eunice, mildly.

Mrs. Crosdill made a movement as though to rise. "If there is going to be a blasphemous discussion I beg

that you will excuse me, Godfrey," she said, in a low voice, addressing herself solely to her brother.

"I have said nothing blasphemous," returned Eunice, speaking sternly for the first time, "and I shall be very glad for you to leave the table if you intend treating me with the rudeness that you have used to me since I entered the room."

Mrs. Crosdill stared at her, too astonished to take advantage of the permission that had been granted. During the eleven years of Eunice's married life she had never spoken with such decided authority on any subject. Bransby, whose stinging irritation was increasing in proportion to his sense of powerlessness, actually brought his doubled hand down on the table with some force, and exclaimed,—

"Let me tell you, then, that *I* consider it blasphemous to compare yourself to Christ, or to choose such expressions for repetition! Do you mean to compare yourself to Him?"

"It is what we are told to do. He is our model. We are supposed to imitate Him as closely as possible. It is the only way in which we can tell how far we have progressed in goodness. Everything is comparative."

"Do you mean to excuse that—that obscene word which you used just now?"

"I don't consider the word obscene, Godfrey. It is a name for a certain class of women, just as 'gentlewoman' or 'prude' is for others. It seems to me rather strained that before my husband and his married sister I cannot talk frankly of any recognized fact."

Mrs. Crosdill, who had recovered herself, here put in shrilly,—

"I beg, at least, that you will remember that *I* ob-

ject strenuously to any such facts being discussed in my presence. I am not one of the modern married women who make the holy estate of matrimony an excuse for all sorts of indecencies and immoral conversations. I feel as polluted by low and vulgar expressions as though I were still a maiden, and I only hope that you will give me warning the next time you intend to use such language."

Eunice merely gave her a cool glance, and said, slowly,—

"You are very trying, Lydia."

"I can say the same thing of you, most emphatically, Eunice," retorted Mrs. Crosdill, angrily. "You show no consideration for my feelings whatever. You have certainly changed in many ways. I suppose it is this intimacy with Mrs. Dering. You have always been easily influenced."

"I think we had better not continue this painful conversation," said Bransby with some hurry. "It is not only intensely disagreeable in itself, but it prevents digestion."

"I shall be only too glad to remain silent," asserted his sister, curving her long neck.

The rest of the meal was passed without a word, and as soon as it was over Eunice went up to her own room. She had a lamp brought in, and drawing her favorite chair to the fire, sat with her hands clasped over a little volume of Wordsworth's poems, trying to smooth her frayed nerves and to find a solution for her saltless domestic life. She was just reading to herself, in a sort of sobbing whisper, those exquisite lines from the sonnet to a skylark,—

> "Type of the wise who soar, but never roam,
> True to the kindred points of heaven and home,"—

when the door opened slowly and her husband entered the room.

This bedroom of Eunice had something of her own delicate personal charm. Its windows, curtained with a semi-transparent silk of a purplish lilac, looked out upon a haze of winter trees, accentuated here and there by dark evergreens. The walls were panelled with wood faintly tinted with the same rosy lavender. Silver sconces held clusters of wax candles on either side of the toilet-mirror, which was framed in silver and ivory, while one of its many doors, half hidden by its lilac draperies, consisted of a large pier-glass. The bed was of carved white wood; the chairs daintily covered with flowered satiny stuffs. In the air was a faint odor of heliotrope, and on the walls charming water-colors, chiefly of spring and winter landscapes. In this matter of arranging her own room Bransby had given her entire freedom, and it was the one spot in the great bare house which she really loved. She started to her feet as he came in, her entire surprise at this visit written in her widely-opened eyes and parted lips. Something in her very astonishment irritated him still more.

"This heavy perfume is stifling!" he exclaimed, looking about him. "No wonder you look pale. I cannot think that such an atmosphere is healthy."

Eunice drew herself together with a start. She became once more the quiet image which he had learned to regard with suavity as the highly desirable result of his conjugal teachings.

"Shall I open a window?" she asked, in her soft voice.

"No, no; of course not," he said, impatiently. "The wind is blowing a hurricane; it will be bitter cold by to-morrow."

"How sad for the poor colored people!" Eunice could not help exclaiming. "They suffer so terribly from the cold, and they have that world-wide horror of the poor-house. I was thinking only yesterday," growing suddenly animated in her momentary self-forgetfulness, "how nice it would be if we could build, as it were, a little village of cabins, Godfrey, say each to consist of one room, neatly furnished, and then to rent them out at merely nominal sums, say a dollar a month, just to keep the poor souls from feeling that they were living entirely on charity. Do you think it would be practical?"

"I must say that I do not," replied Bransby. "Who would provide their food?"

"We might easily make an arrangement for that."

"But why separate cottages? Why not one large, comfortable building?"

"No; it is just that that I wish to avoid. I don't think any one realizes how most people resent living in herds. Why, I was talking with one of the old, old slaves the other day, and she was telling me of how she had been depressed merely by paying a visit to the poor-house. 'Oh, honey,' she said to me, 'it was dreffu!! All dem pore creeturs so mizzubul en den jes' 'bleged tuh be mixed up tugedder! 'Peared tuh me heaven would'n' be all we hoped fuh ef we could'n' git out o' dee crowd.' Just the feeling of self-respecting individuality that it would give them to have their one little room to themselves would be a blessing beyond words to them. If I could do it I would pull down every 'poor-house' in the world and build little villages in their stead. Besides, the mere name is an insult. I——"

"Excuse me for interrupting you, Eunice," here put

in Bransby, "but I came to speak on other very important matters with you. I will be happy to discuss this one to-morrow."

"Certainly," she said, with a sensation of inward shrivelling.

Bransby drew up another chair and sat down opposite her. His senses were not in the least roused by the warm, glowing room, or by the loveliness of the woman before him, whose fair throat emerged exquisitely from its collar of silver-fox fur, and the scarlet of whose lips was accentuated by the pressure of a slight forefinger against them. The streak of sensuality which exists in most cold natures, and which was not absent from his, had never been touched in the slightest degree by his wife. As they sat studying each other, while apparently gazing into the fluttering blaze of the wood-fire, a sense of antagonism began gathering like a slow but powerful electric current in the heart of husband and wife, he resenting the fact that after years of colorless submission she had suddenly opposed him, she recalling with cold scorn detail after detail of his bloodless tyranny.

Her advantage in the interview which was about to take place lay in her thorough knowledge of him and his theories, while her real nature was as undreamed by him as though it did not exist, and the ideas of life which had been accumulating almost unconsciously in her mind year by year she had never expressed to him or to any other.

"I hope you will believe that my intention in what I am going to say to you is wholly a generous one," he began at last a little nervously. "I am sure that you will admit that whatever things I have opposed you in have been with an idea of your good."

"I admit that you have thought them for my good, Godfrey. I believe that you are a thoroughly conscientious man."

"Indeed?" asked Bransby, nettled. "I am glad that you do me that justice. However, to come frankly to the point, it is about this—this intimacy of yours with Mrs. Dering that I wish to speak to you." He paused as if expecting her to make some reply, but she merely said, after a moment or two,—

"Go on. I am listening."

"You know my opinion of Mrs. Dering," then continued Bransby; "I consider her a coarse, unbridled woman, who can only injure so delicate a nature as yours by contact. It's the old story of the porcelain jug and the iron pot floating down-stream together. I notice after only one year of your intercourse with her a great, a serious change in you. I do not think you know how this knowledge has grieved me."

"In what way am I changed, Godfrey?"

"Well, for one thing, your manner has grown more assured, more self-assertive. You do not hesitate to disagree with me before my sister and openly at the table. You oppose your views to mine almost with an air of boldness. In a word, you have lost some of that subtle, exquisite aroma of true femininity which is as fine and as easily brushed off as the down on a moth's wing. I feel that you are growing away from me and all my views of life,—that we are getting totally out of sympathy."

"And when were we ever in sympathy, Godfrey?"

Bransby started and lifted his large, pale-brown eyes to hers.

"Do you mean to say that you think we were ever in sympathy,—you and I?" she went on before he

could speak. "Have you ever looked out the exact meaning of the word 'sympathy'? I have. It means, among other things, 'an agreement of affections, likings, tastes, temperament, pleasure, sufferings.' Have we ever had this agreement of feeling? Our affections have never been for the same people, nor our likings for the same objects. Surely, our tastes are as opposed as the poles! Tolstoi is your master, your ideal; you have often told me so. I adore music. I was even gifted with a good voice. You forbade me to cultivate this gift except in the most weary, commonplace directions. You told me that such music as that of Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, Gounod, Wagner, was immoral, evil, unduly exciting, and morbid. You scarcely liked me to sing my children to sleep. The birds were free to sing. God had given them voices, and they had no one to silence them; but I was your wife, you were my husband, having authority. You silenced me. You took away from me this supreme and holy pleasure. You never doubted that you were right, never questioned that God had been mistaken in bestowing on me the talent for music. As for our temperaments, you do not even know mine. When a woman finds that the man whom she has married is cold, phlegmatic, unaffectionate in his nature, do you suppose that she is going to let him see that hers is warm, thirstily-loving? Is it to be imagined that when her husband tells his wife of a fortnight that passion is an outcome of fallen human nature and is only acceded to in moments when the lower self is uppermost,—can you possibly dream that after that she will not strive with every nerve to hide from him the fact that she possesses one spark of passionate feeling? And yet you disciples of Tolstoi do not hesitate, after carefully explaining

how degrading is this fact of man's desire, to condemn the women you have made your wives to submit to every condition of marriage, and to bear your children whom you do not love when they are born."

"Do not love my children!" echoed Bransby, catching at the one assertion in this outpour of long pent-up feeling which he could undertake to refute on the spur of the moment. "*I* not care for my children! You must be beside yourself. When have I refused my children any pleasure, any advantage? What is the matter with you to-night, Eunice? Are you mad?"

She was of a brilliant pallor. Her eyes seemed black; but she spoke in the same rapid, intensely quiet tone,—

"No, Godfrey, I am not mad. I think I am quite sane for the first time in my life. I seem to see everything so clearly. As for your not refusing your children any pleasure or advantage, the essence of love is more subtle than that. We might be willing to bestow every material benefit on some heathen whom we had never seen, but could we, at the same time, honestly say that we felt a personal love for him? I was so young when I married you, Godfrey. My ideals of life were so keen and fresh. I was prepared to accept life unquestioningly as you interpreted it to me. And now—now, after eleven years of marriage to you, I feel that I have never given you one spontaneous emotion,—that I have never received one whole-hearted moment of affection from you. In the 'Kreutzer Sonata'—yes, I have read it, I have taken that step of my own free will—I feel that I am a free, individual being. I alone am responsible for my own soul; not you or any other human being. I say, then, that I have read the Kreutzer Sonata, and that I am think-

ing of the passage where Posdencheff says that Charcot would have declared his wife hysterical. You probably think that I am hysterical, and yet in Tolstoi's book the man says that they were living immorally. Surely, there is no such cause in our case! You are the coldest of husbands, I the most frigid of wives! Tolstoi would not admit that I might be suffering from starvation for love,—would he? He thinks that he is wiser than nature,—more far-seeing than God." She paused, a sudden crimson staining her white cheeks,—one hand at her breast. "Ah!" she cried, "he has much to answer for, that Tolstoi of yours. In his Kreutzer Sonata he has given married people a hideous weapon with which to wound each other. The cold woman can always cry to her husband, 'You are a sensual monster! Read what Tolstoi says about you!' The cold husband can say to his wife, 'Passion is a degradation. I will give you the Kreutzer Sonata and you can see for yourself.' And then, after trying to turn the world topsy-turvy with his harsh, impossible theories, look how inconsistent he is. Look at his immense family!—his wife and children dragged, willy-nilly, into a barren poverty!—his last contradiction of his own teachings!—for I read in to-day's paper that he had presented a manifesto to the Russian government declaring that unless it guaranteed to feed the people until next harvest, and faithfully performed the pledge, there would be a revolution, in which he himself would take part. And this from the man who teaches that on no pretext must we resist evil! But it is on a par with his other declarations. Four years ago Matthew Arnold said, in an article in the 'Fortnightly,' 'Count Leo Tolstoi is about sixty years old, and tells us that he shall write novels no more!' And then see! He

gives to the world his Kreutzer Sonata. He desires that men should abstain from all alcoholic drinks, and yet the Christ that he worships made wine for the marriage guests after they were well drunken! He declares that marriage is a deviation from the doctrine of Christ,—a sin! And yet it was at a marriage that Christ performed this miracle of making the new wine! He condoned by His presence a fact which, according to Tolstoi, he regarded as a crime! It is monstrous! It is hideous! It is abominable!" Bransby was staring at her, his eyes fixed, his face contorted. He even trembled slightly.

"Is this all? Have you said what you meant to say?" he stammered, finally.

But Eunice had begun to walk about the room, eagerly, restlessly, like some graceful, prairie-creature that has been caught and caged,—her long gown making a mysterious sound over the rich carpet.

"Ah, no! All? It is not half! Do you think that I can utter in twenty minutes the unspoken thoughts of eleven years? I do not mean to reproach you. God forbid! You are very kind to me. You give me every luxury. It is not your fault that I have failed to rouse any response in you,—that your nature is a cold one. What I wish is a certain liberty. I must think and read and feel for myself. I must select my own friends. I can understand perfectly that Barbara Dering should be uncongenial to you. She is the refutation of every belief that you cherish. She is like a splendid living passion-flower, and you wish only lilies sculptured in marble. She dares to feel, and to declare feeling a noble thing. Her husband adores her, honors her, comprehends her. She is more sacred to him because of her wifehood than she could ever have been

as a girl. That she has grave faults you would find her the first to acknowledge; but she is trying, day by day, to conquer them. We strengthen each other. I have helped her through terrible hours. She has been my good angel in many a dark moment. But she worships nature and man as God has made them, not as Tolstoi would have them; and, unlike me, she has had full, wholesome, comprehending love!"

"Yes," cried Bransby, viciously, "from two husbands!"

Eunice's face, which had been of a tender, glowing rose-color, grew suddenly as hard and chill as porcelain.

"Certainly," she said, quietly. "If you choose to look at it in that way. I am not at liberty to discuss her private affairs. Indeed, I am not trying to defend her or her ideas. What I want to say is this: a crisis has come in my life. I have begun, as I said, to see and feel for myself. I intend to educate my children according to my own views, not those of your sister, and I want to ask that you will not oppose me. I also wish to be quite frank and honest with you, and to tell you that I cannot, on any consideration, give up my friendship for Barbara. Of course, I will not ask her to this house if it is disagreeable to you, but I intend to write to her and to receive her letters. Another thing is this. I cannot submit to your sister's insolence. You must speak to her, or I will take the children and leave for some watering-place. I might go back to Florida. Yes, I will say it. I wish to say everything to-night, to have done with it. It has been hard enough to me to speak at all; but I think that your sister has a bad heart, Godfrey. I think she is a hypocrite. Thank God, you have never been that!"

"You flatter me," said Bransby, hoarsely. He had

been forced to run the gauntlet of such unusual sensations during the last half-hour that he felt mentally as well as physically breathless, and was throbbing with a curious kind of numb resentment which he scarcely realized at the moment. One fact of which he was convinced was that of Eunice's sudden rebellion. He was as startled as a man who, pacing the deck of a well-ordered ship on a summer night, is bewildered by the sudden flare of vividly-colored signals. He had come to read his wife a lecture on unconsidered friendship for eccentric and daring characters, and she had suddenly broken the silence of eleven years by a flood of vehemently expressed, original opinions opposed in every particular to his own austere ethics.

In the meantime she had sunk into a chair near the table and hidden her face upon her folded arms. Her loosened hair made a soft dusk over her bent shoulders. She felt that she had spoken, that she had been born again as it were of water and of the spirit. She would go to sleep a different Eunice Bransby from the one who had waked in the carved white bed only that morning. She was more her own, less her husband's, than she had ever been. Happiness she had given up trying to clutch, as a child releases a dead winged thing which it has held until it has grown cold. But the higher visions of life lay beyond her. To make herself one with the great purposes of existence, to become a cheerful co-worker with nature, to accept mystery as a tender boon, suffering as a dear friend, death as a holy interpreter, to turn the flames of her own anguish upon the darkness of others and show them how to live and love more worthily by its keen light,—that was left to her; that joy remained, serene, inviolate, untarnished.

Bransby, watching her, thought that she was only exhausted by her intense outburst. After pondering for some moments, he said, with great magnanimity, "Well, good-night, my dear. You are overwrought and tired now. After a quiet night's rest we can discuss all this more satisfactorily. Do not annoy yourself when you awake to-morrow in a calm mood. I quite understand that you have been in a superexcited and unnatural state this evening. I ought not to have come to you when I saw that you were not feeling well."

"Thank you. Good-night," said Eunice, mechanically, holding up her pale cheek sidewise to receive his unflexible kiss. When he had gone she flung herself down on her knees, and, wringing her hands together, moaned out,—

"Oh, my God! Thou who art Love, Thou who madest men and women and decreed marriage, have mercy on me! have mercy on me!"

XXII.

Bransby had never before been called upon to face such a problem as that which now presented itself. After a night and day spent in uncomfortable consideration of the matter from every aspect, he was forced to admit that the time had come when his wife could no longer be coerced by a disapproving word or glance, and that she was fully determined to carry out her intention of thinking and acting for herself. As for Barbara, her influence in all this was very apparent. That it was an unconscious influence Bransby did not know, and certainly could not have been expected to

imagine. He regarded her as one of those alluded to by St. Paul, "who creep into houses and lead captive silly women," and his feeling of animosity to her was not decreased by his realization of the justice of many of his wife's personal remarks. Altogether, Barbara stirred in him sentiments of a nature akin to those which the heirs of a blind person would probably feel towards a physician who had restored him to sight when his former state of darkness would have better suited their interests. To the weak no sensation is so delightful as that of power, whether worthy or unworthy. A vague suspicion of his own lack in certain virile qualities had been lulled, for Bransby, through all his married life, by the unquestioning sway which Eunice had allowed him to exercise over her. It pleased him to see this bright young creature become staid, meek, reserved, at his behest, to hide the beauty of her arms and throat from others because he desired it, to lock up her favorite music and refrain from singing all but sacred songs because he found this course preferable. He had restricted her reading, dictated her occupations, overlooked her correspondence and even selected her hours for exercise. He had occasioned her much suffering during the illness of her children, because, as a devout Tolstoian, he did not believe in doctors, and would never send for one, until the last moment. In all this petty indulgence of an egoistic authority he had found that curious delight which some children find in pretending that their image in the glass is a real person, although they know perfectly well that there is nothing substantial behind the frame. It was in his character as reflected in Eunice's submission that Bransby found compensation for the emptiness which existed in its actual counter-

part. There was a tinge of the bully in his composition, if so masculine a word can be used in so shadowy a connection, and now that his victim, his "fag," as it were, had turned and faced him, the idea of attempting to reconquer his old position never occurred to him. His chief thought was how to acquiesce with the greatest show of firmness and dignity, how to agree to his wife's requests, without seeming to have been forced into an agreement; in a word, how to assume the attitude of one who bestows a benefit, rather than of one who accedes to a demand. Above all, he was almost feverishly anxious that his sister should not know what had taken place.

To Eunice, however, the hours of waiting were almost intolerable. She knew him thoroughly in most respects, but this situation was so unlike any in which they had ever been placed before, that she could not depend on her past knowledge of his character to decide upon the position which he would now take. She even thought that he might make a desperate resistance and come to some extreme resolve, such as a sudden sale of The Poplars, for instance, or a threat to intercept Barbara's letters. Many wild conjectures passed through her mind during the night and day that followed his visit to her room. She was, therefore, entirely unprepared for his calm and amiable manner the next evening, when, following her into the library after dinner, he placed himself, with sedate deliberation, between the arms of a fragrant leather chair. He looked at her, smiled, softly tapped his finger-tips together.

"Well, my dear, have you quite recovered from your nervous attack of last night?" he asked, suavely. "You still look pale, I am sorry to see, but those blue

shadows under your eyes have gone. It is not so damp to-day. That is always better for your neuralgia."

"Oh, yes, the weather is much softer. The roses have opened on several bushes to-day. This knot I have on, I cut it near the door."

"Those pale flowers always suit you admirably," replied Bransby. "You have no gown I like better than that deep green velvet, and the little Venetian ruff suits the contour of your face."

"Yes, it is very pretty, and so warm. But my velvet is getting shabby, I'm afraid. Do you want me to get another green one, or would you rather have a different color?"

This appeal to his taste and authority fell soothingly upon Bransby's disturbed self-confidence. He replied graciously that he could think of nothing more charming than an exact reproduction of her present costume, adding, in a by-the-way tone,—

"Er—those matters we were speaking of. I wish to explain to you that you have indeed mistaken me, if you think I want you to educate our daughters according to my sister's ideas. That I consider many of her ideas excellent I must admit, but I also think that the mother is the only proper guide for her children."

"I am very, very glad that you agree with me," said Eunice, in a low voice. Her heart was beating fast, but her delicate face and figure wore their usual composure.

"And—er—I have also decided, after long and serious thought, that I do not wish to interfere with your friendship for Mrs. Dering, that is—er—in reason. I am willing to admit that her unfeminine views and decided manner of expressing herself may have preju-

diced me against her. Indeed, she must have some good qualities to have won your affection, my dear." And here he bent upon her a benign smile. Eunice was too amazed at the completeness and ease of her victory to speak for some moments, not allowing for this parrot-like quality of succumbing at once to firm handling.

"It is very good of you to admit so much, Godfrey," she said, finally. "I hope that you will know Barbara for yourself some day. But, until then, I don't want to have her here against your wishes. Apart from annoying you, it would be very unfair to her——"

"Oh, I can trust to you to keep things within bounds," said Bransby, blandly. "Besides, she does not like me any better than I like her, I fancy. She generally goes straight to your room when she comes. There is one little matter, however, in which I hope you will oblige me. I heard Winifred attempting to whistle the other day, and when I reproved her she said, 'Mrs. Dering does it.' Now, I may be old-fashioned, but I do most earnestly object to a woman's whistling. I hope you will make Winifred understand this."

"Yes,—yes, indeed, Godfrey!" exclaimed Eunice with a touch of eagerness. She held out her pretty hand crusted with darkly-glowing jewels. "You may depend on me not to teach them anything of which you actually disapprove; only in matters of a more personal nature I feel that I alone must judge for them. There are some things that a father can never understand——"

"Oh, certainly, certainly," assented Bransby, also with an approach to eagerness. "I understand that entirely."

His relief at having accomplished what he wished, and actually having her treat him as though he had

conferred a favor upon her, so pleased him that he not only took her extended hand in both his own, but ended by placing his moustache carefully upon its satiny back before releasing it.

"As to some of the other things to which you alluded," he went on, in the same easy tone, "I cannot help thinking that you were overstrained, my dear. I know how delicate your nervous system is,—how it responds to the slightest friction,—and I can also understand how, at times, Lydia should annoy you, although with the best intentions, for I do not think her in the least hypocritical. But, as I was saying,—forgive me, my dear, if I tell you that I do not think you are capable of judging,—I have always guarded you as carefully as a florist some rare orchid. You do not dream of the brutish natures of most men. My extreme consideration may have seemed to you coldness, but I am persuaded that had you been married to an ordinary man, you would have died of horror within a year. These matters, however, are not for tenderly-cherished women like yourself to discuss. You cannot, in the nature of events, know anything about them. Brutality, sensuality,—what are they but names to you? Only I beg that before you condemn me as cold and unfeeling, you will also try to realize that self-control, consideration, restraint, are the highest proofs of respectful devotion which any man can show to any woman."

"You are very kind,—very, very kind to me, Godfrey," said Eunice, with that increase of adjectives which so often denotes lack of spontaneousness. Bransby was deeply content. He felt that his chaste bit of oratory had accomplished even more than he had hoped.

In this second interview Eunice's tact had served her as good a purpose as her firmness during the first, and if she had dragged her husband protesting from his perch of self-esteem, she had certainly succeeded in stroking to a dandy-like gloss his ruffled plumage.

Before going to bed Bransby also had a conversation with Mrs. Crosdill regarding her general attitude towards Eunice and the children.

"You know, my dear Lydia, how sympathetic your views are to me, but Eunice is a very high-strung woman. We must make allowances. Allowance should be made for natures not naturally religious and well balanced like our own. You remember what the apostle says, 'To the weak became I as weak that I might obtain the weak.'"

"Yes; but he never said that to the blasphemous he became blasphemous, or to the headstrong headstrong," retorts his sister, sharply.

"He said that he became all things to all men," ventured Bransby, somewhat timidly.

Mrs. Crosdill frowned over the elaborate altar-cloth which she was embroidering in gold bullion, on a crimson-velvet ground. Her next sentences were punctuated by sharp jerks at the needle, which seemed to relieve her feelings in somewhat the same manner that a series of silent oaths might have done.

"My dear Godfrey, I have always been convinced that the verse which you quote was improperly translated in the first instance, or more likely taken down incorrectly by St. Paul's amanuensis. You will remember that he often dictated his epistles. Bishop Cammersell told me only last month that such mistakes must frequently have occurred."

"Of course. I am sure of it," Bransby hastened to

admit. "But, at least, we know some things which are beyond dispute. 'And if meat cause my brother to offend.' There can be no discussion about that, I suppose. That is what I wish to call your attention to, in regard to Eunice. She is a devoted mother."

"Say rather a foolishly indulgent one, my dear Godfrey. I have never known a child who gave way to such paroxysms of rage and insolence as Winifred."

Bransby drew the corners of his mouth together with a reflective thumb and forefinger, shaking his head slightly.

"I am much distressed by Winifred's treatment of you, Lydia; but, indeed, my dear, I think you will only make it worse by interfering."

"I am sorry that you consider my sisterly interest interference, Godfrey," replied Mrs. Crosdill, turning inward her thin lips and puncturing the heavy velvet with a force which had in it a hint of viciousness.

Poor Bransby was beginning to feel helpless. He now said, almost pleadingly,—

"Don't say that, Lydia; you hurt me very much."

"My dear Godfrey," returned his sister, rising and beginning to sort and put away her silks and bullion, "the wholesome truth frequently hurts, in fact, nearly always, but I shall certainly try to meet your wishes in this respect, as in every other. However, I can think of nothing that would please me so much as for you to have a long, quiet talk with Bishop Cammersell about the position of a man in his household, and the education of children. You would find him delightful, so learned and cultivated, a prominent religious author, and a man of wide experience. He is not dictatorial. I cannot imagine a more gentle, winning, Christ-like personality. He has nine daughters

of his own, and has passed through burning ordeals. The death of his devoted wife was a blow which I fear has shattered his constitution. I cannot tell you what he was to me when Dabney died. Such patience! Such wonderful power of uplifting consolation! And then so practical in his advice,—so wise in his views of life and resignation! I feel that it would be difficult for one who lived daily in his atmosphere of calm holiness to refrain from idolizing such a character. I received a letter from him which was forwarded from Florida only to-day, and which is full of that godly spirit pervading his whole life. If you would care to read it——" She paused, and took up a little morocco-box which always sat beside her near her work-basket. It contained her Bible, prayer-books, religious poems culled from newspapers, the last tracts, and to-day the letter of Bishop Cammersell, who was bishop of a distant State in which Mrs. Crosdill had lived during the years of her marriage.

"I should be delighted," Bransby assured her, stretching out his hand for the letter, which was written on large sheets of ruled paper. The handwriting was squarely round, and here and there tremulous.

"My dear Friend and Sister," so ran the bishop's epistle,—"I have long been meaning to write and tell you of my earnest approval of your noble and unselfish work among the unenlightened children of Florida. Surely this cup of cold water will bring you ample reward, both in the future life and now also, in the gratitude and love of these little ones who must have already learned to look up to you with loving gratitude. Ah, how the heart aches when we are forced to ponder upon the souls of thousands of children, as willing and

ready to drink in salvation as these which you are leading to our blessed Master, and which are yearly claimed by darkness,—yes, lost forever because we do not lay enough stress upon that solemn command to preach the Gospel to every creature! I cannot tell you, my dear friend and fellow-worker in the great vineyard, how gratified and encouraged I am by the success of your brave mission among these poor infants, nor how earnestly I pray, night and morning, that God may bless and prosper your efforts. That you may see how sadly even our most civilized towns are in need of like missions, however, I will relate to you a most sorrowful case which took place under my own eyes. It was that of a young girl, a sempstress, who had long worked for my family, who had indeed just finished the mourning of my poor children for their sainted, beloved mother. Forgive this uncertain chirography. I cannot yet allude to my dear, dead saint without terrible agitation. However, to return to the story of poor Lucy Andrews. She had been coughing all winter (indeed, I had often remarked how ill she looked to Nelly, who used to make her beef-tea with her own hands during her last illness), so that it was scarcely a surprise to me when I finally heard that she was dying. Well, I went to see the poor girl. She had been a faithful, hard-working creature, had sent her two brothers to school with her earnings, and had housed an unfortunate but repentant Magdalen for over a year, and reclaimed her, by loving persistency, from the ways of sin. She also gave in many small ways, of which others had told me, for she was very shy and retiring and would never have spoken to me of such matters on her own account. When I began to question her about her religious beliefs, however, I

found, to my consternation and grief, that this poor creature had never been able to believe in the divinity of Christ, except, as she said to me, that He was nearer God than any one who had ever lived. All night I remained with her in prayer, but, struggle as she might, she could not seem to accept this vital fact. Oh, my friend! God grant that you may never be called upon to witness such a scene! She would cling to my hand and sob piteously and moan aloud, 'Oh, bishop! bishop! *make* me believe it! I cannot! I cannot! I love Him! I have always tried to do as He said, but I cannot believe that He was God, in the way you tell me I must believe. Oh, bishop! do you think that my soul will be lost if I can't believe it? Do you think I will never see mother and my dear Jack again?' (The poor girl was here alluding to her betrothed, a young fellow named John Newin.) My friend, what could I say? I knew that except through Christ there was no salvation. The words, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,' kept rising before me. I repeated them to her again and again. It was useless. She expired with wild cries, shrieking that she loved Him, but could not believe in Him.

"Think, then, my sister, of what you may be doing for the young souls who gather about you every Sabbath; you might even read them this account of poor Lucy, if you think it would serve to impress upon them the lesson of Christian faith. My daughters and myself join in sincere thanks for the delicious bananas which came exquisitely packed in the gray Southern moss. How beautiful is its Indian name, 'the curtains of death!' and how sombre are those actual curtains when through them we do not see the light of

Christ shining gloriously, as it must always shine for true believers!

"Your faithful friend and brother,

"LIONEL CAMMERSELL."

"A very striking, noble letter," said Bransby, folding it and returning it reverently to its long envelope. "That last figure about the 'curtains of death' was most powerful. He seems to be a man of imagination as well as of deep religious quality, and his praise must be very gratifying to you, Lydia. It is indeed a good work that you have been doing."

"I try to give my widow's mite," Mrs. Crosdill said, deprecatingly. "It is all I have. Ah, Godfrey, how I should like to do for Winifred what I have been doing for those little strangers! I have not yet questioned her on her religious belief, but from her way of speaking I fear she is in outer darkness, to a great extent. She has no idea of reverence whatever. The other day I found her teaching her pug-dog how to sit up on a volume of Taylor's sermons. But about the bishop, if you cared to see him! He passes by here soon, on his way to Ashleigh, where you know he has a winter home, the climate of his own State being very trying. Suppose you were to ask him to stop for a day or two? I think that you would find his effect upon Eunice truly marvellous——"

"Er—if you would let me show her his letter," said Bransby, somewhat hesitatingly, "it could not help striking her——"

"Oh, his command of English is conceded to be wonderful, by every one who hears him preach. His illustration and simile are really extraordinary. He might even be persuaded to give us a sermon, if he stayed

over Sunday. Of course I shall only be too delighted for you to show his letter to Eunice. It may throw a more favorable light upon my own character."

Here she turned her lips inward again and stiffened the muscles of her throat in a gesture of scornful indifference.

"My dear Lydia, I am sure that Eunice has a very high idea of your admirable qualities!" exclaimed Bransby, nervously. "But of course such a letter could but increase your most ardent admirer's good opinion of you. I will take it to her now."

"Well, I pray that it may bring forth good fruit, Godfrey," she returned, brushing her cold cheek along his in that contact which to them represented a kiss. "And now good-night, as I shall have gone when you come back. Pray slip the bishop's letter under my door, when Eunice has read it."

"Yes; good-night," said Bransby. "I hope very much that he can come. His letter is certainly most powerful and attractive. I will let you know at breakfast to-morrow about inviting him. It depends only upon Eunice's health, I assure you."

"Good-night," repeated Mrs. Crosdill briefly, taking no notice of his last remark, except by a slight movement of one corner of her mouth.

XXIII.

Eunice was very amiable about the bishop's letter, commended his sympathy with Mrs. Crosdill, said how sad was the fate of Lucy Andrews, and admitted that the figure about the Indian moss was calculated to im-

press a congregation very deeply. She agreed at once to send the desired invitation, and in response to it Bishop Cammersell appeared promptly at The Poplars. When he entered the house his fair skin was faintly rosed, by his drive in an open trap, through the stinging air, and his large, violet, benign eyes looked out from eyelashes frosted with cold moisture. He was very tall and of a fragile build, and had white, curling hair, which grew rather long and fell about his face in gently ecclesiastical ringlets. His large, rather bonelessly-modelled nose overdrooped a full mouth with deeply-pointed upper lip, the other melting into the curve of a slightly retreating chin. He had those long, white, easily-moving hands which the world somehow associates with distinguished bishops, and his finely-modulated voice had a way of falling softly at the end of his sentences. Mrs. Crosdill had asked to go to the station to meet him, and was now assisting him to remove his heavy great-coat and to shake the snow from his hat. Winifred, in her best frock, with a sheer, white pinafore over it, backed slowly down the long hall, silently comparing the real bishop to his black-and-white likeness.

It struck Eunice that she had never seen her sister-in-law so animated. There was a bright purplish spot of color under her prominent eyes, and her gestures seemed suddenly to have grown more natural and vivacious.

Lois, a pretty, olive-eyed dumpling, sat solemnly in a carved chair by the chimney-corner, with her plump legs straight in front of her, and a Maltese kitten grasped firmly by the throat.

"How charming this great, round hall is, with its big fireplace and tapestry curtains!" said the bishop,

genially. "How very kind of you to ask me here, Mrs. Bransby! Our greatest pleasures always come unexpectedly. Don't you find it so?"

"Oh, yes,—yes, indeed! How wonderfully true!" exclaimed Mrs. Crosdill.

Eunice found the bishop's talk much more natural and attractive than his letter-writing. Watching his face when Mrs. Crosdill addressed him, she decided that her sister-in-law sometimes bored him with her enthusiastic acquiescence in his least remark.

The bishop, in the mean while, was charmed with Eunice's frail loveliness and the blossom-like beauty of her two children. Bransby also seemed to him very agreeable. Altogether it was one of those sudden and congenial intervals in a petted prelate's existence.

"Well, my child," he said, addressing Winifred as she ventured to approach, clasping a small, tulle-arrayed doll in one brown little hand, "is that your favorite daughter, and are you bringing her up in the way in which she should go?"

"I don't know," said Winifred. "She's very ill,—she's broke her leg." And she turned her child's voluminous skirts over her head, displaying a pink calico nudity and two china legs in painted black boots, one of which had been broken at the stout ankle. Mrs. Crosdill suppressed a cry of shocked modesty.

"Winifred! *Winifred!*" she exclaimed, in a harsh whisper. But the bishop taking the doll into his own hands, composed her ruffled skirts, and said that the best thing in the world for a broken leg was to have the severed foot restored to it by a strong glue.

"Yes; but you see it's lost," replied Winifred, gloomily.

"Then make one of sealing-wax," said the bishop,

cheerily. "I've often done that for my little girls. Bring me a bit of black sealing-wax and I will heal your daughter at once."

"Oh, dear bishop! How *charming* of you!" exclaimed Mrs. Crosdill. "Winifred, my dear, if you will run up to my room, you will find a stick of black sealing-wax on my writing-table."

Winifred scampered up the shallow, oak stair-way, which opened inviting arms just opposite the hall fireplace, and soon returned with the sealing-wax. Then the others gathered around while the bishop carefully modelled an impossible foot and adjusted it to the broken ankle. Only Eunice remained quietly in her low chair near the fire, her eyes upon its mellow core, her hands twisting a little glass screen framed in silver. She felt wearily apart from all this orthodox gayety. Bishop Cammersell had ordained the clergyman who had united her to Bransby. She was thinking with great bitterness of her married life. It seemed more a farce than usual to her just then. She felt herself smiling.

"My dear Mrs. Bransby," said the bishop, rising and coming over beside her, "'a penny for your thoughts,' as my daughters say to me. You were evidently recalling some agreeable reminiscence."

Eunice decided in a flash that the bishop was uncomprehending, but answered simply,—

"I am very glad that you could come, bishop, but perhaps the drive in an open carriage was too cold for you?"

"Oh, no. I like plenty of fresh air; and Mrs. Crosdill almost smothered me in fur robes. How very lovely this country is! What an ideal home you have here!"

"We are very fond of it," said Eunice. "My husband bought it from the Nelsons and remodelled it in the colonial style. The staircase is taken bodily from an old English house of the time of Charles II."

"And beautiful it is, too!" exclaimed the bishop, putting on his glasses to observe the carving more minutely. Then he started up with an exclamation. "But whose photograph is that? Surely—but no—and yet what a likeness! I used to know a young girl so like that,—Barbara Cabell,—but——"

Eunice's face grew vivid in a heart-beat.

"It is Barbara Cabell!" she exclaimed. "Only she is married. Her name is Dering now,—Barbara Dering. Did you really know her as a young girl, bishop?—and did you think her as lovely then as she is now?"

"She was thinner," said the bishop, reflectively, "and she wore her hair brushed straight back from her forehead. She is more beautiful in this picture than I remember her."

Eunice could not help flashing a glance at Mrs. Crosdill, whose face wore a look of sudden disapprobation.

"You have not mentioned that this is her *second* marriage," she observed, tartly.

The bishop started visibly.

"You see the bishop and I agree on the subject of second marriages, Eunice. There is something savage and unchristian in them, at least to our thinking."

"I cannot realize that Barbara Cabell has been twice married," said the bishop, slowly. "What a brilliant creature she was, to be sure! As vivid and untamed as a hawk, but wonderfully intelligent! I liked the child. Others found much fault with her I know, but somehow my heart always yearned over her."

Eunice was absorbing these remarks with a full and quiet sense of the sting which they must hold for her husband and sister-in-law.

"I think you would like Barbara far better than ever, bishop," she said, naturally. "She has grown spiritually and mentally almost beyond my power to describe."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the bishop, with an air of unfeigned delight.

"I might as well tell you, dear bishop," here put in Mrs. Crosdill, feverishly, "that my brother and I do not agree with my sister-in-law in this opinion. I, for example, find that Mrs. Dering is very unfeminine in many ways, and more like a hawk than ever."

"I will ask Barbara to dinner, and the bishop shall judge for himself," said Eunice, whereupon Mrs. Crosdill flushed darkly, but made no further remarks.

XXIV.

Barbara and Dering (the latter had just returned from New York) accepted the invitation to dinner, and Barbara had a lustrous, gem-like beauty in her straight gown of white with its bands of darkest sable.

Dering paid her so many compliments on the way over, that when they arrived the usual clear pallor of her face was overlaid with a warm flush. The nape of her firm throat shone whitely under little tendrils of dark-red hair. Other tendrils escaped and floated back over the band of pearls, which lost itself under her heavy coils. There was a knot of Parma violets at her breast.

The good bishop, who was as capital a judge of beauty as most of his brothers, was enchanted.

"My dear child!" he exclaimed, enfolding her strong, rose-tipped hand in both his own pale ones. "How glad I am to see you looking so well and happy! Your charming friend, Mrs. Bransby, tells me, too, that you have improved as much in soul as in body during all these years. Ah, how well I remember your dear mother! You have her eyes,—the same clear, honest, beautiful eyes. I am, indeed, overjoyed to see you again, my child, and under such happy circumstances!"

"Dear bishop," returned Barbara, in her rich, cordial voice, "it is very nice of you to take such an interest in me!"

She pressed his hand gratefully, and felt herself more drawn to this simple, kindly, blue-eyed priest than to most others of his cloth. Dering, from a distant corner, eyed him critically.

"Oh, Lord! it's another of those spoilt bishops!" he had exclaimed, crossly, when Barbara showed him Eunice's invitation. "For Heaven's sake, Bab darling, say you've got a finger-ache or something! Let's stay at home. By Jove! there's no bigger bore than this thing of bishopolatry."

But she had persuaded him to come, drawing in gloomiest colors a picture of Mrs. Crosdill, and appealing to his Christian charity to lighten poor Eunice's burden, if only for one evening.

She and Eunice soon fell into close conversation, while Mrs. Crosdill, a little apart, worked with aggressive concentration at her conspicuously ecclesiastical embroidery, and the men grouped themselves before the roaring hickory fire. Dering, with his legs firmly

planted, one hand pulling at his short moustache, the other thrust deep into his trousers-pocket, the bishop sunk into a huge leather chair, his delicate hands dangling tassel-like from either of its arms, Bransby standing in an attitude of hereditary composure, with one hand thrust under the tails of his rigidly smart evening coat.

"Now about our missions, bishop," burst forth Dering, suddenly. "Bransby tells me you are interested in missions. I was talking to a friend the other day,—a friend who's in the Senate and up in such things,—and he tells me that nearly all the troubles in China and the Hawaiian Islands have been occasioned by our missionaries. They make a row and incite the natives to rebel, and then they murder some authority or other, and the government sends down a gunboat and bombards the island. I must say that I agree with Lawrence Oliphant in thinking that one thing's awfully needed nowadays, and that's a 'missionary to the missionaries.'"

The bishop hastened to answer.

"My dear sir!" he exclaimed, "if the world had listened to such tales where would our religion be now? The government always exaggerates at the expense of the Church. But then I am an enthusiast on the subject of missionary work. I may express myself too warmly."

"I can't help thinking that missions, being the truest sort of charity, should begin at home," said Dering. "But then, of course, I don't know anything really. Only I can't help rather sympathizing with H. H. in her feeling about the Indians. It seems to me that, after the shabby way in which we have treated them, we owe them all our missionaries at

least. I have spent some time in the West, and the way in which those poor devils—— I beg your pardon, sir!—but really the way those poor chaps were cheated by the government agents was infernal!—I do beg your pardon! It always makes my blood boil so to think of it that I don't seem to be able to choose my words."

"Indeed, you are most excusable. I can quite comprehend your feelings," said the bishop, pleasantly, "but I cannot help thinking that your generous enthusiasm is somewhat wasted on those savage outcasts."

"In my opinion," said Bransby, slowly, "the Indian is a low, treacherous, unredeemable being, who should be exterminated as soon as possible."

"Ah, no, my friend, I cannot say that I endorse that view of the subject," objected the bishop. "They are certainly discouraging subjects for regeneration, but some noble work is being done among them. However, I understand very well Mr. Dering's feeling about the need of missions nearer home. You will remember, my dear Mrs. Crosdill, that letter I wrote you about poor Lucy Andrews. Surely, that was a case for earnest missionary work."

"Ah, yes, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Crosdill. "That was terrible, terrible! I woke with a start only last night, haunted by your graphic description of that poor girl's cries. What a tragedy! A noble soul like that lost forever from the mere lack of proper spiritual training!"

"What was this sad story, bishop?" asked Barbara, coming suddenly forward, her lips parted in that eager forgetfulness of self which to some people made her face so irresistible. At her request, the bishop repeated

the sorrowful end of Lucy Andrews. As he went on a look of suppressed excitement gathered in Barbara's wide eyes, and when he had finished speaking she exclaimed,—

"But surely, bishop, you didn't let the poor girl die in the belief that she was going to everlasting torment?"

The bishop, sharply astonished, paused a moment before replying.

"My dear Mrs. Dering," he then said, "the idea cannot be more painful to you than it was to me; but what alternative was there? Soothing equivocations are not to be spoken in the room of death."

"Is it possible," said Barbara, a sort of horror welling into her face, as she spoke,—"is it possible that you really believe she went to hell,—such a good, dear, loving soul as you describe her to have been!—just because something in her mind could not accept the letter of the law?"

"And pray, my dear Mrs. Dering, what would you have done in my place, had you been a bishop?" he demanded loudly, whereat a faint titter was heard to come from behind Mrs. Crosdill's embroidery-frame, and Bransby shifted his position a little uneasily.

"I should have told her that God is love!" cried Barbara, her face glowing. "I should have said to her, 'Poor child, whether you can believe these details or not, do you think that God will be less merciful to you than men? It is with the *heart* that man believeth unto righteousness. With the *heart* that we love.' And 'love is the fulfilling of the law.' If she loved the Saviour, she believed in Him in the deepest sense of the word. I heard a sermon once by a Lutheran preacher, and he said such a good thing about that. 'When you say that you believe in a man,' he said,

'in Emerson, for instance, do you mean to say that you believe that his mother was a Miss So-and-so, or his father a lawyer in a particular town at the time of his birth, or that he was born on a certain day of a certain year? No! You mean that you believe in his teachings, his philosophy, his theory of life,—in a word, you believe in a man, not in the details of his birth; and if you believe in the words of Christ and try to do His will and love His beautiful personality, you believe in Him, far more worthily than any orthodox Christian who accepts every historical detail relating to His appearance among men and yet hardens his heart to his fellows!' "

As Barbara spoke her face got paler and paler until it shone with a sort of white radiance from within. The bishop, who, although undeniably rather vain and overpetted, had a kind heart and a very clear sense of justice, had come to the conclusion, during Barbara's little speech, that her fervor was prompted by real enthusiasm, not by a perverse desire to oppose her unconventional ideas to his orthodox teachings. He said, with gentleness, after a slight pause,—

"Well, my dear, you must remember that I am an Episcopal bishop. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,'—that is what I am ordained to preach at all costs, even though my soul is torn with pain in so preaching."

Barbara came nearer, and finally seated herself on a low chair near the bishop's, so that her attitude had in it something childlike and winning.

"But, dear bishop," she said, when he had stopped speaking, "if to love God with one's whole being and one's neighbor as one's self are the foundation-stones on which rest all the law and the prophets, surely, surely,

this poor Lucy, who told you over and over how she loved the Saviour, and who had loved a poor sinning outcast as herself,—surely, because she could not believe in the orthodox sense of the word, you do not think her soul lost forever?"

"My child," returned the bishop, "I appreciate the loving-kindness of your own heart which prompts you to plead so eloquently for this poor girl. But God's ways are past finding out. She died in unbelief. The Church has but one opinion for those who die in that manner."

"God is love," said Barbara; "love forgives, forever and ever."

"And yet, my dear, there is an unpardonable sin."

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed Barbara, starting to her feet. "I have always thought that the unpardonable sin was the belief that there was any sin which God's love would not pardon."

"My child! my child!" said the bishop, warningly, "take care that your mercy-loving and enthusiastic nature does not carry you into great error. Works without faith cannot avail,—rather they have the nature of sin, as it is said in the thirteenth article of our religion,—because of the very fact that they are done without true piety,—that is, without belief in the divinity of our Lord."

"But surely right is right and wrong is wrong, bishop, no matter who does either. If a man who had been a thief all his life were to restore a jewel that he had stolen, that one act would remain righteous, even though he were to go on stealing jewels the next day. And although a man were an orthodox believer and the most rigid of Christians, as far as faith went, and yet were to kill his brother, the crime would remain

a crime. Would it not? There are so many things which hurt me in our religion,—things which seem to me so wrong, which I cannot admire or respect. Now, for instance, in our little church here in this neighborhood there are some tables on which the commandments are written, and every child or poor, ignorant person can spell out for themselves every Sunday the terrible words, 'for I the Lord Thy God am a jealous God, and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation.' Yet who would ever think of setting up the tables inscribed with God's own contradiction of those words?—that eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel which so few seem to know. I would give such a set of tables, oh, so willingly! and yet I am sure that I should not be permitted to do it. Wait till I get Eunice's Bible and show you the verses which I would select." She brought the book and read eagerly, "'Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should

return from his ways, and live?' Ah, dear bishop!" she ended, clasping her hands over the arm of his chair, and turning an eager face up to his, which was very puzzled and solemn, "do let me give a set of tables with those words on it to some church in your diocese. I have so longed to do it. Please, please say yes!"

The bishop looked as he felt, decidedly upset and uncomfortable.

"We shall see! We shall see!" he murmured, letting his eyes rove about, as though for some object which would suggest a simile that might tide him over this direct and embarrassing appeal. "Such a question could not be decided at once. It's a very serious matter,—more so than you think, my dear. Such tables would offend many people, and be sure to wound the consciences of the weak brethren. But I shall reflect upon it, my dear. I shall certainly reflect upon it."

Here Uncle Amos, appearing between the heavy tapestry *portières* which filled the great arch between the first and middle halls, said, pompously,—

"Dinner's purnounced, Miss Eunice."

XXV.

During dinner, Barbara, having seen that the feathers of the worthy bishop's soul were somewhat disturbed by her eagerness, brought all her tact to the task of soothing them again. She won him to relate his most impressive anecdotes, appealed to him on literary matters, and delighted him by her description of a clever little niece of Martha Ellen's, who was only six years

old, and who could repeat, by heart and with fluency, the second chapter of St. Matthew. Eunice could not decide whether the bishop was conscious of the effect which his evident pleasure in Barbara's bright talk was producing upon Mrs. Crosdill. That lady bridled, smiled now and then to herself with demure bitterness, and tapped her chest with a show of absent-mindedness which clearly denoted her inward irritation.

Bransby and Dering were discussing the race question, so Eunice was at liberty to observe quietly all that passed, while she arranged a saucer of jelly for Win, who had been allowed to come down to dessert, and who was delightfully prim and self-important in a short-waisted white muslin frock tied with a pink ribbon and wearing a little mob-cap on her dark curls. Having scraped up the last spoonful of the wine-sauce, which was served with the jelly, she said to her mother, in a discreet whisper,—

"Mother dear, I feel funny in my knees, but it's *very* cheerful."

Eunice smiled and nodded over the orange which she was peeling.

Presently Win whispered again,—

"I think Aunt Lydia's crosser'n usually 'cause the bishop's preachin' his whole sermon to Barbara."

Eunice could not help smiling again, but touched her lips to her finger in a pantomime of the worn saw about children's being seen and not heard. As the conversation grew more animated, however, Winifred urged,—

"I just *must* tell you this, mother: I *do* think the bishop's a little unpolite 'bout takin' the best things. He always took the best piece of celery, and now he's tooken the biggest banana. Do you think God will

punish me for thinking His bishop a little teeny weeny bit greedy?"

"Hush, Win," said Eunice, gravely, though she had more desire than ever to smile. "You are getting saucy. You must try to get over that way you have of criticising older people. It's very improper in a little girl."

"But, mother dear, isn't the truth as truly true when a little girl thinks it 'bout a bishop as when a bishop thinks it 'bout a little girl?"

"Yes; but it is the bishop's duty to tell little girls their faults, while it would only be disrespectful if little girls told bishops what they thought were their faults."

"Well, is it disrespectful if I can't help liking Barbara's husban' better, and he ain't a bishop?"

"No; that's no harm. But hush, dear, you're talking too much."

Win began to eat her orange section by section, plunging her little crimped teeth into the clear yellow fibres, and curling her red lips away from contact with the stinging juice. As she ate each division she placed the seed, with the dainty deliberation peculiar to her, along the edge of her plate. The bishop, happening to glance up, watched this operation with the sympathetic smile of a somewhat sentimental father.

"Was it not a sweet thought of our Heavenly Father to make such delicious fruit for us all to enjoy, my child?" he asked, at last.

Win gazed frankly at him over her last bit of orange.

"But He made poison-berries an' things, too," she replied, abruptly. "Why do you reckon He did, sir?"

"They are not poisonous to the birds of the air, who live upon them, my dear."

"Well, parsley kills parrots," said Win. "'Cause we

had a parrot, and it ate it, and then it died in a hurry. But of course I know 'He doeth all things well,' sir," she hastened to add, fearing she was being disrespectful, and noting, besides, with a child's quick intuition, the cloud of annoyance that was gathering on the bishop's brows and the anger brewing in the eyes of her aunt.

When Barbara and Dering were once more in their snug brougham on the way home, he suddenly caught her to him and laced her arms close about his throat.

"There! For Heaven's sake let me feel the contact of something warm, reviving, human! I've been talking abstractions with that lump of frozen dough, Bransby, until my marrow feels about to congeal! Your lips, Barbara, before I turn into marble, like the chap in the 'Arabian Nights.'"

Outside, the fields were smooth with snow and the sky like the inside of an onyx globe, set with sharp, many-colored diamonds. It was very cold, and the window-panes were soon frosted with their breath.

Dering laughed, and wrote Barbara's name with his finger upon the blurred glass.

"There!—that's typical. I always see the world through that medium!" And again he kissed her.

"But how terrible for poor Eunice to be shut up in that country house all winter with Bransby and his sister!" said Barbara, after a while. "She is a goddess of patience. I couldn't stand it."

"You!" Dering laughed at the idea. "I can fancy you giving that would-be Mrs. Bishop a piece of your mind. What a terror she is! Worse than the man. But I like Eunice much better than I ever did."

Barbara was delighted, and put her left hand upon his, in which her right was already clasped.

"How glad I am!" she exclaimed. "She is a wonder, but so quiet that most people don't understand her and are apt to think her weak. She has always liked you."

Dering could not help grinning a little as he answered,—

"She has a great variety of tastes. She must have a genius for adapting herself to different characters, if she likes me and Bransby at the same time."

"Oh, Jock! You must see, you must feel——" began Barbara, and then stopped, afraid of being disloyal to her friend. "Eunice was so very, very young when she was married," she added, hastily.

"Poor soul!" exclaimed Dering. Then taking Barbara's face between his hands, he rested his lips upon hers in a long, complete kiss of quiet intensity. "There!" he said, as he lifted his head. "Just to think that she has never been kissed like that in all her eleven years of marriage! What a shame! And such an adorable mouth as she has, too!"

Barbara smiled back into his half-mischievous eyes, then, with a contented sigh, settled herself comfortably against his side and rested her head upon his breast. He had never seemed to her so charming, so much a man, as thus contrasted with the pale and emotionless Bransby. The movement of the firm muscles in his arm, as he searched for his match-box to light a cigarette, pleased her woman's pride in strength. She could not understand at all how Eunice, even as a very young girl, could have fancied Bransby, with his dapper, incapable little figure, his smooth pale hair, his neat beard, cut exactly in a point, his great light-brown eyes, and thin, colorless lips. She thought of his tiny hands and feet with a sensation of physical revulsion. Even

that fierce cruelty which is so often an excrescence of strength was more acceptable to her than the frigid, sexless calm of Bransby's conjugal manner. She recalled Mommsen's saying, that "there is no genius without passion," and agreed with it vehemently. At least Dering, with all his faults, was powerful, responsive, full of varied fire, and never roused in her that sense of mental nausea which she felt convinced must have sometimes overpowered Eunice, in the presence of Bransby's tepid platitudes about heaven, life, and duty, all three of which he could only know as quotations from highly orthodox and conventional volumes. He himself reminded her of a paragraph from a religious novel. This last fancy made her laugh out and press her head with a childishly affectionate gesture against Dering's shoulder, kissing the stuff of his coat as she did so.

"Darling!" he said, charmed. "But why did you laugh? What were you thinking of?"

She told him, and they were merry at Bransby's pious expense for some moments. The glare from the moonlit snow glimmering in at the carriage windows lighted up their faces with a pale glow, and they could see each other's white teeth flashing gayly. A sense of youth and vigor stirred them both. They grasped each other's hands so eagerly that it was almost painful, and gazed at the windows, from which they brushed the moisture now and then, with that excitement in detail which possesses two children who are traversing a strange country.

"How dim and blue the hills are! and how they melt into the sky!" said Barbara. "I feel so strong and gay—just as though I could take your hand and run over that bright snow for hours, without feeling

tired. Brr! *What* an odious dinner it was! How dreadful most ecclesiastical anecdotes are!—don't you think so?"

"Yes; the bishop was much better than his stories," admitted Dering, slowly, hindered from responding wholly to her gayety by that sudden feeling of religious conventionality which sometimes overwhelmed him. He allowed himself a certain license now and then in speaking of the clergy, but resented it in others, even in Barbara. It was the same feeling that makes mothers ready to punish their children themselves, while they get angry with any one else who attempts to do so.

Barbara was too happy and gay to-night, however, to notice the negative tone in his voice, and went on, eagerly,—

"How beautiful it is! How I love these rolling fields all swathed in snow! They are like the breasts of Titanesses, with a red streak here and there that looks like blood."

"Oh! oh!" cried Dering, in a shocked tone. "What would Bransby say if he could hear you? What an immodest simile! How lacking in all womanly refinement!"

And again they laughed gayly.

"I'll tell you what," said Dering, after a moment or two, "Mrs. Crosdill is setting that hideous widow's cap of hers for the blue-eyed bishop. She'll marry him, too!"

"Oh, Jock! do you think so? I fancy she bores him. And then with their horror of second marriages——"

"Horror of fiddlesticks!" retorted Dering. "They'll put it on a high moral and religious platform. You

see if they don't! She will marry him to be a mother to his—nine daughters did he say?"

"And he?" asked Barbara. "What will he marry her for?"

"Oh, I dare say he'll suddenly becomes convinced of the positive command in that verse 'a bishop *must* be the husband of one wife.' You know there are people who take it that way."

"How glad I am that you are not a bishop!" Barbara exclaimed, frivolously. "I couldn't help feeling as if it were a sort of religious ceremony whenever you kissed me."

Their moods were mutually sympathetic to-night. To Dering she seemed perfection, in her simple white gown with the little furze of red-gold strands outlining her fine head. The violets at her breast gave forth a languid perfume, and the high collar of fur on her cloak accentuated the smooth clearness of her face. Her voice, rich and low, thrilled him as though he had heard it for the first time. He was more thoroughly in love with her than he had ever been and ventured to kiss her throat with something of a lover's timidity.

She felt nearer to him than she had for a long time. That air of husbandly assurance which she resented had entirely disappeared. They went to the music-room, on reaching home, and Dering lay on the rug before the fire and smoked, while she played softly the different odds and ends that he loved best. After a while she stopped, and coming over beside him, said,—

"A penny, Jocko! I can almost hear your thoughts."

"I was thinking," said Dering, slowly, "what hard luck it is that every one isn't as happy as I am. And

then I was trying to realize that there were people to-night who, in addition to mental suffering, were cold and hungry. It seems hideous."

"It is hideous," said Barbara. "Sometimes I wonder so about it all. I would be so willing to give all I had to the poor, if I really thought that it would be anything but a penny dropped in mid-ocean. How I should love to see you a great philanthropist, darling! I have so often thought that a great work lay before you in that line."

"How strange!" exclaimed Dering, lifting himself upon his elbow and looking at her curiously. "Gad, you *are* a witch—you wonder!"

"Is that what you have been thinking of?" asked Barbara, tenderly. Then she looked at him with her deep, loving eyes, and, resting one hand on his thick hair, said, in a low voice,—

"If you could think out some plans for lessening poverty and vice, I would be willing to give up everything and help you in your work. I mean even if you wished to live with the working-classes as Felix Holt did. Only"—she paused, and then went on seriously—"I don't believe in equality any more than I would love a world that is one vast level. There must be valleys and mountains in human nature, as well as in landscapes. People are happier for looking up. What I long for is, that every one should have the blessing of happy work and ample earning. But that idea of living in droves is horrible to me. It would make of life one vast American hotel. I don't think any one who had a touch of the artist in them could ever have imagined such a system. The very monotony of it would pall on one. I really think I'd rather be a jolly tramp, with a certain amount of exciting doubt as to

how I should get my dinner and where I should sleep that night."

Dering smiled, and, taking her hand from his hair, pressed its palm against his lips a little absently.

"'The destruction of the poor is their poverty,'" he said, at last. "Of that I am convinced. But how to help it,—how to help it!" He was silent again and sat gazing into the flameless fire.

"Do you think of making it a life-work, dearest?" she asked, after some moments. "How happy that would make me!" Her face lighted up. "Oh, Jock, how happy we should be if you thought of that!" she cried again. "I would be with you in everything,—even in the most quixotic things that you might do. If you were to give away all our money, you would never hear me murmur."

Dering looked at her with a rare moisture in his eyes. "Oh, Barbara," he said, "if that poor devil Lydgate in 'Middlemarch' had had a wife like you! It seems to me that you are the only entirely comprehending woman I ever knew. I am sure you are the only woman who never has any petty jealousies."

"I could not care for any one unless I had absolute faith in them," she said, proudly. "Women who weep or make scenes, because their husbands unexpectedly spend a night away from home are beyond my comprehension. Either I believe in my husband or I do not. If I believe in him, surely there is no need of watching him and making his life a burden, by requiring from him an account of every moment he has spent away from me. If I don't believe in him, what difference does anything else make?"

"You dear, big-hearted, big-minded, big-souled dar-

ling!" exclaimed Dering. He knelt up and put both arms about her.

"You have forgiven me entirely, haven't you, dearest?" he whispered.

"Oh, my dear! how can you ask?" She kissed his eyes and forehead and stroked lovingly his boyish curls.

Suddenly they discovered that they were hungry, and Dering suggested that they should go to the store-room and see if there were anything to eat. These midnight raids on the larder they found delightful, and often chattered over an impromptu feast of this sort until nearly one o'clock. Barbara now lighted one of the tall silver candlesticks that stood on the piano, and they went through the dining-room and opened the door into the little arched way which led to the store-room. As soon as they passed out, a gust of wind whipped the candle-flame down to a blue fleck, and the dogs began to bark angrily. Barbara held her skirts nervously about her, while Dering tried to fit the key into the lock. She dreaded that sudden, panting rush of the dogs, which always made her heart jump so foolishly. At last they got the store-room door open, before the dogs reached them, and were at once enveloped in that peculiar musty odor of cheese, apples, jam, bread, potatoes, meal, cold meat, which pervades all store-rooms. Then Barbara held the candle while Dering scrambled upon a flour-barrel and investigated the top shelf. He found a huge rosy pear, handed it down to her, and at once she thrust her teeth deep into the juicy flesh, with a little cry of pleasure, dancing about with her mouth full, like a merry school-girl.

Dering, from his perch on the flour-barrel, gravely admonished her.

"You, 'a wife and a mother,' as the novels put it, to be capering about like a madcap! What would your last admirer, the bishop, say? Cease, cease, I beseech you, madam, this unseemly conduct, and have the grace to leave me as much of that pear as Eve left Adam of the apple."

"Here, you can have all the rest!" cried Barbara, holding up the closely-nibbled core.

But Dering was occupied in tearing away great crackling bites from a crisp, wine-sap apple, and did not notice this generous offer.

They found a round, crimson cheese, some cold turkey, a bunch of celery, a jug of hard cider, and a great loaf of brown bread, and with this booty returned to the dining-room, where, chattering like two affectionate magpies, they spread some napkins over the green cloth, arranged plates, and placed knives, spoons, and forks, Barbara rushing into the greenhouse at the last moment, and bringing in an azalea-bush in full flower, "to make things pretty," as she said.

As she ate, with that dainty carefulness that Dering loved, he watched her, more enchanted than ever. The little gurgling noise which the cider made in flowing down her throat, and which might have irritated him in an unloving mood, seemed to him the most charming thing in the world. The dewy-red of her lips, her pretty way of lading her slice of bread with little morsels of the gold-colored cheese, then nibbling it fastidiously with the points of her small teeth,—all this seemed to him as individual, and therefore as delightful, as her hair, her eyes, her voice, her way of speaking. He could not realize that he had ever been angry with her, and she looked so thoroughly the girl, as she sat with her hair hanging loose about her shoul-

ders, that he found it hard to believe that their child lay sleeping up-stairs, only the hall's length from their own bedroom.

XXVI.

The unpleasant emotion which had risen in Dering on learning that Barbara was to have a child, and which he called by various names, but never by its true one, jealousy, had been latent for several weeks. Barbara, in her position of mother, seemed to him astonishingly reasonable. He had expected her to merge her individuality into that of the little Fairfax, to be nervous about the baby's health, on all occasions, absent-minded and preoccupied when with him, a constant inmate of the nursery, in constant need of *tête-à-têtes* with the family doctor,—in a word, the devoted mother, entirely at the expense of the companionable wife.

As none of these changes took place, he returned very soon to his normal state of mind, and even took a strange, humorous sort of pleasure in the child,—its queer little spasms of expression; its faint and mysterious sneezings, which sounded like the noise made by rose-leaves popped on the back of one's hand; its long yawns almost dislocating its tiny jaws; its vague and momentary opening of round black-blue eyes. All these he found exquisitely droll; and when, one day, he saw in its small, downy face a certain movement of the brows, which was a direct inheritance from Barbara, he could not contain a shout of amusement, which terrified Fair into vigorous howlings.

About ten days after the Bransbys' dinner, however,

the baby was taken suddenly ill, and Poppleton, the neighborhood doctor, had to be sent for, at midnight. As such things happen, the weather was very bitter, roads and meadows iron-bound, with a black frost. Dering detested cold, and was not over-amiable about getting into his clothes and going out to one of the cabins, to rouse Tobit and send him for the doctor,—this being necessary, as none of the servants, except Martha Ellen and Aunt Polly, slept in the house, and they were both busy over Fair.

An hour later Poppleton was at Rosemary. Dering had come down-stairs to get some whiskey, and was standing in his dressing-gown over an open register when the doctor entered. He was a huge man, of about forty-eight, with a smooth, dark-red face, on which no hair had ever grown, small dark-blue eyes set between thick folds of fat, like the seeds of some fruit in its pulp, and over which he wore gold-rimmed spectacles seemingly imbedded in a crease at the base of his nose. This feature was of indefinite outline, speckled with violet pores and inclining to the left. He had a handsome mouth, about which were deep, stationary dimples, large jaws, mottled with a vinous purple, and surmounting his high, oval forehead a dark-brown, much-curled wig. When he laughed, which was often, he disclosed splendid yellow-white overlapping teeth. He wore a faded plum-colored coat, which was spotted orange, here and there, by spilt physic and red clay. His ponderous calves were strapped into russet gaiters, and between his shoulders he carried a great, leather-covered medicine-chest. His hands, handsome and glazed with fatness, had broad, bitten nails, over which the pink flesh curled back. His custom was to address each patient in the voice of some

other, and he now began, in a high, quavering treble, which Dering instantly recognized as that of an old man in the neighborhood who had turned Methodist preacher in his sixty-fourth year.

"So the little heiress of Rosemary has the croup?" he trilled forth, with perfect mimicry. "May the Lord see fit to aid my poor efforts! For 'tis not in my physic-box alone to succor her. Alas! if such——"

"Do shut up, doctor, and come along," said Dering, curtly. As a rule he was "great friends" with Poppleton, who amused him vastly, but to-night, in addition to his real anxiety about the child, he felt that he had caught cold and was not in a responsive mood.

The doctor, who understood and liked him thoroughly, smiled good-naturedly, and began to mount the stairs, planting each great creaking foot softly with the air of an elephant attempting to walk on tiptoe. Dering followed, determined, as soon as the baby had been dosed, to ask for something to stop his cold. He gave a violent sneeze, just as they reached the nursery door, and resolved angrily that Tobit should be lodged in the house to-morrow, in case of future emergencies. As they entered the room they saw Fair striking out with her small fists, in her effort to breathe. Barbara was walking her up and down, a fixed expression on her pale face. A sudden throe of mother-love had seized her. She felt that if the little creature on her breast were to die, it would be like tearing a piece of her heart away with forceps. Martha Ellen followed her, with cooing sounds of comfort, her great eyes bright with tears. Mammy Polly at the fire was warming another blanket, the scorched smell of which filled the room.

Somehow Dering felt aggrieved that, although he

had taken a bad cold, no one spared him a thought, but seemed utterly absorbed in the croupy morsel which Barbara held with such an expression of dread on her face.

"Well, well, well, well, well!" murmured the doctor, unconsciously falling into the tone of Mammy Polly, who was now swathing Fair in the smoking blanket. "Let me see! let me see! Now, honey, you cheer up right away!" he added, addressing Barbara suddenly. "Here, give her to me; we'll have everything all right in a minute or two. She'll be 'jes' ez spry ez a black-snake with a new hoop-skirt,' as old Tom Jinx says." And here he adopted the voice and accent of another patient.

Dering sat grumpily resigned close to the fire, with one of the baby's blankets drawn closely about him and over his ears. The shrieks of poor little Fair, the doctor's cheery jokes, the skurrying back and forth of Aunt Polly and Martha Ellen, all gave more and more on his irritated nerves. Finally, when boiling water was poured into a bucket filled with lumps of lime, and the room dim with puffs of the penetrating steam, he could stand it no longer, and said that as he could be of no use he would go to his room, and the doctor must come after him if he was needed, or if he, Poppleton, wanted anything. He built a huge fire, wrapped himself in more rugs, and filling a tumbler with hot water and whiskey, established himself in an arm-chair with a volume of Greek history.

He was deep in the education of the young Spartans, and wondering if Spartan babies ever had croup, when Poppleton entered simultaneously with his knock, wiping his pendulous chin and the back of his huge neck with a flowered handkerchief. He nodded cheerily at Dering, and called out in the tones of yet another

patient, a young fellow with a voice as ill-proportioned to his size as that of a grasshopper, and who thought himself a second Booth,—

"'Tis well, 'tis very well! All works as I would have it! So! Ha! ha!" then, noticing Dering's unencouraging expression, dropped into his natural manner and said, easily,—

"Little heiress getting along first-rate! I see you're having a toddy this bitter night. Thermometer only two above zero. I tell you 'twas cold riding here!" The doctor's air was a masterpiece of unconsciousness, but Dering poured him out four fingers of whiskey, which he drank at once with the mildness of a kitten lapping milk.

"I say, doctor," burst forth Dering, abruptly, "what the devil's good for a cold? I've caught an infernal one to-night going out after some one to send for you."

"Quinine, quinine, quinine!" chanted the doctor.

"But it makes my head buzz so," objected Dering, crossly. "Do show some originality in your prescriptions! I've taken enough quinine for colds this winter to stuff a pin-cushion, and I never found it did me any good. For Heaven's sake try again."

"Ten drops of camphor, then. Can you take camphor?" said the doctor, who was too fond of him to mind his surface humors.

"I'll take anything," said Dering, with gloomy recklessness.

"Oh, ho! don't I wish I'd had those fellers that granted that charter for prize fighting in Virginia in your frame of mind!" returned Poppleton. "Wouldn't I have fixed 'em up with ten drops of vitriol and prussic acid apiece!"

"Yes, I know. It's a disgrace to the State. But

our joint opinions on that subject aren't going to help my cold, are they?"

The doctor grinned, while dropping ten drops of camphor on a lump of sugar, and Dering proceeded to suck it with that solemnity which pervades for us our personal ailings. Poppleton could not help laughing at his serious face.

"I'll tell you what," said Dering, unmoved, "if you had the colds I have you wouldn't see much humor in them."

Before the doctor could reply Rameses appeared at the door and beckoned him away.

Fair recovered from this attack, but was feverish and ailing for two weeks, during which time Dering saw scarcely anything of Barbara. His cold had proved rather severe, and he was in bed for a day or two, but Barbara could not spare enough time from Fair to read to him, and he lay in lonely discomfort, that aggrieved feeling which had come over him in the nursery growing ever stronger. They were both ill, he told himself, and while the child had two competent attendants, Barbara could not even tear herself away from it long enough to do more than irritate him by opening and shutting the door within such a short space of time. It was evident for which she felt more sympathy, more anxiety. Her very coldness at first was all the more reason that she should now become excessive in her fondness. All romance was over and done with! He went on lashing himself into a sort of frenzy. He would hear of nothing now but croup, colic, teething, nurses, physics, change of climate! He flung himself angrily about, and finally lay still and stared at his reflection in a glass which stood at the foot of his bed.

His sallow face and the dark circles about his eyes filled him with a spasm of self-pity.

"By Jove! she can see me look as ill as that and keep away from me as she does! What a fool I was to build air-castles and actually fancy them granite! I suppose those cynical old chaps are right when they say that women are meant for mothers before everything else! What a come down!"

He laughed, and the savage expression of his face in the glass struck him as perfectly appropriate to the present state of affairs.

One afternoon, ten days later, he and Barbara went for a ride. Wilful, Barbara's horse, of which she was so fond, was a lean, compact chestnut, with a delicate crest, splendid shoulders, long, elastic pasterns, and quarters that could lift him even over a snake-fence when not too exaggerated in height. His greatest beauty was his head, tipped by slender ears, clear-cut as though shaped with a pair of fine scissors. His wide front, splashed with a large white star, gave him a gracious air, and his eyes were overarched by full brows, on which was a darker pencilling. He carried his tail like a triumphant gold plume, and his mane shone like ravellings of silk. He was excitable but entirely kind, and knew Barbara as her dogs knew her. Dering's mount was as different as possible. A powerful half-bred bay, with a short barrel, head tapering too abruptly to a small-nostrilled muzzle, pasterns short but clean, and broad, well-shaped hoofs. Dering rode him with a bit and bridoon, while Wilful's bridle was a single-reined snaffle, very light, yet with a thin bar capable of hurting, and he also had on a noseband, as he pulled a good deal when his blood was up. Dering, still pale and fretful from his cold, fumed about

stirrups and saddle, while Barbara's mulatto groom swung her up on Wilful, and Rameses fed him with sugar to keep him quiet.

Dering was in a sore, sullen state of mind, and, moreover, had determined that he would have it out with Barbara, during this ride and put her love for him to the test. Her gayety and delight in Wilful and his antics jarred on his nerves more every instant, especially as Wilful's whirlings and playful rearings and backings stung him now and then with anxiety for Barbara. It seemed to him, in his sulky mood, that she was reckless and inconsiderate, laughing aloud as Wilful swung her about in the saddle, and letting the reins give to their full length under the impatient movements of his neck.

As they began to canter down the long lawn, he gave way to his vexation, and cried, rather crossly,—

"If you can't make that beggar move decently ahead let's pull up to a walk!" Wilful, in fact, was cantering sidewise as deliberately as though he had been a gamesome crab, and Barbara, convulsed with merriment, was giving him his way. She saw that Dering was in a dangerous vein, and answered, good-naturedly,—

"Yes, I know it's awfully provoking, but I never can make him walk when he first starts."

Dering grew more and more provoked, but was silent, not wishing to give way to his anger, before finding out the true state of her affections.

It was one of those perfect days which come so often in a Virginia winter. The air had that mingled warmth and freshness of early spring; there were bits of young green here and there; the fields undulated in a soft wind, and overhead was a curve of blue, across

which frail clouds were swept as by a gigantic broom. The roads, spongy and yet not actually muddy from a light fall of snow, which was now thawing, were in excellent condition for galloping. Wilful struck out into his graceful swinging stride, his neck, which was like iron cased first in india-rubber and then in satin, eagerly arched, his nostrils distended. Close to his flank the big bay, Standby, lumbered steadily. Somehow Barbara's evident delight in her horse fretted Dering. He was in a mood to resent any form of enjoyment in another. Her very exuberance of physical strength and radiance accentuated his own dragged-down condition and sensation of inertness.

"Er—I'm not feeling very fit," he began, when they had settled into a trot along an uneven bit of road. "I need some toning up, I fancy, and then, too, I'm getting pretty sick of doing nothing. It's an awfully lazy life that we've been leading."

"Yes, I wish that you had some steady occupation, Jock," answered Barbara, brightly. "I don't think that any one can be really happy without it."

"Well, there's a splendid chance for change of scene open to us," said Dering, with an air of such intense unconsciousness that she at once decided he was about to propose some extraordinary scheme. "I've had an invitation from Leland,—you know that fellow who's so interested in social questions,—we were college chums. Well, he's going West on a sort of shooting and investigation tour combined,—private car and all that. He wants us to come,—you and me. Mrs. Leland's a charming little woman,—crazy to know you. In fact, they're both awfully keen about your coming."

She looked at him earnestly.

"But Fair!" she asked, finally. "We couldn't drag a baby of that age along with us?"

"I should fancy not!" exclaimed Dering. "I certainly don't propose making nuisances of ourselves!"

Barbara thought that the invitation might have been given for a later date, and asked when they were expected to be ready.

"In ten days. They start from Washington on a Wednesday."

She was silent for some moments, trying to comprehend whether really he wished her to leave the child so soon after its severe illness.

"Well," he broke out, impatiently, "shall I write and accept, or do you think it would be better if you were to do it?"

"Do you mean, Jock, that you wish me to leave Fair while she is so delicate?"

"Delicate? Fiddlesticks! You young mammas are like Chicken Little when the leaf fell on her back; she thought the sky was falling, and you go to pieces over a simple attack of croup! I don't suppose there ever was a baby who didn't pull through attacks of croup more or less sharp. Julius Cæsar, Oliver Cromwell, Napoleon Bonaparte,—they all had it I'd stake my life!"

"Fair didn't have a simple attack of croup, Jock. She had diphtheritic sore-throat, and is liable to other attacks like it, until the cold weather is over."

"Oh, I might have known you'd make the worst of it all, just to avoid leaving her for a week or two! I must say you're about as 'hoodooed' by your first-born as any one I ever saw."

Barbara flushed, then after a second said, quietly, "I

think it's very natural that I should not want to leave her as weak as she is now."

"There's Mrs. Bransby! She knows any amount more about babies than you do. Leave the brat with her!"

Barbara flushed still more, then grew pale.

"I shouldn't be satisfied to leave her with any one. If she were to be very ill and I away enjoying myself, I should never get over it."

"I suppose not. But I may be as ill as I like, and you don't ever see it, so long as that kid is ailing!"

Barbara gripped the edge of her saddle with her right hand in her effort for self-control. "I thought you had only a bad cold," she then said. "Do you feel really ill? Have you kept anything from me?" Her eyes had grown suddenly anxious. This touched him, and for the moment his tone was softer.

"Oh, there's nothing serious," he assured her. "I'm run down and seedy, that's all. But I feel the need of a change. Do ask Mrs. Bransby to look after the child, there's a darling, and come along with me!" He leaned over and put an impulsive arm about her waist, and the horses, used to such manœuvres, nipped at each other with a friendly pretence of enmity.

She looked puzzled and worried, then turned her dark eyes on him appealingly, and said, "Jocko, you know how much I'd like to go with you, but indeed, indeed I feel that I cannot leave Fair just now."

He withdrew his arm with angry roughness and touched Standby into a brisk trot. Wilful cantered airily a half-length ahead, and some bits of mud were thrown against Dering's shoulders.

"I wish you'd have the ordinary politeness not to spatter me all over with mud from that confounded brute's heels!" he called out.

Barbara brought Wilful down into a trot also, but did not say anything. She felt sure that if her husband kept up that tone with her the discussion would end in a quarrel.

Presently he began again:

"So you refuse, then, do you, to go with me, though I tell you I'm feeling wretchedly and need your companionship! How I have heard you excoriate that trait in other women!" he laughed. "Well, it's the old thing of a fellow-feeling making us wondrous kind, I suppose! That's it! Eh?"

Barbara's lip trembled, but there were no tears in her eyes. She had long since learned to repress this sign of emotion, finding that in moods like this it only goaded Dering to further harshness.

"I don't see how you can put it that way, Jock," she said, at length, in a low voice, speaking all the more gently that she felt her own temper rising. "I despise the lack of fire which makes women slight their husbands for their children as much as ever; but duty is duty. When I see that a thing is right I must do it, or at least I must try to do it. Don't you know that I would leave Fair in a minute—in a second—to come to you if you were seriously ill?"

Dering was silent, and continued to smile as though over mysterious and enlightening thoughts.

"Speak, Jock! You know that!" cried Barbara, growing impatient. "At least you must acknowledge that I've always been truthful. You must believe what I say."

"Well," replied Dering, slowly, "I confess it's rather hard to take in what you say to me with such opposite facts staring me in the face."

"What facts?" said Barbara. "My child—our

child has been seriously, even dangerously, ill. I don't want to leave her and go West for an indefinite length of time. Are those the facts you mean? Is there anything in that but what is womanly, natural, wifely?"

"Womanly and natural, I admit," he sneered, "but—er—hardly what you could call wifely."

"Would you really have me leave Fair?"

"With your friend Eunice? Assuredly."

"And if she were to be very, very ill?"

"She would be in far better hands than those of an enthusiastic and ignorant young mother, who would probably keel over in a dead faint at the first bad symptom."

"You are unjust!" flashed Barbara.

"My dear Bab, calling me names won't alter facts."

"How can you love me, as you say you do, and yet speak to me like this?"

"Our ideas of love probably differ as much as our ideas of duty, my dear girl."

"I cannot understand you!" she exclaimed. "I cannot take in that you are really angry because I won't leave a poor, helpless, ill little baby to the care of others, when it is my simple duty to stay with her. But you're not my Jock this afternoon. You're in one of your black moods. I am sure you'll see things differently to-morrow."

"Are you?" he answered, briefly, with a scowl and a grin together. "Then it'll be a devilish good thing if you get that notion out of your head, as you're laying up a lively disappointment for yourself."

"I wish you wouldn't use such expressions to me, Jock."

"What damned nonsense!" he retorted, roughly.

"You're not over-squeamish yourself when your blood's up! Come now, be honest about it! You know I caught you swearing the other day, or, if not swearing, using jolly strong expletives. Did you or did you not say, 'Plague take the cusséd thing!' when you couldn't get your stirrup tight? Eh? Answer me that, my Lady Highty-Tighty!"

Barbara almost broke into a laugh, but her anger conquered, and she merely curled a disdainful lip in reply.

"Because I'll tell you what," he fumed on. "'Plague take it' is about as abominable an expression as could be used, when you come down to it. The plague is a filthy disease, and when you say those words you are calling it down on the object of your wrath!"

"Do you think that the plague could materially injure a stirrup-leather?" asked Barbara, gravely. "Because, if so, I will ask in my prayers to-night to be forgiven."

"We'll let that go," said Dering, who was now of a curious steely pallor. "But at least you'll admit that 'cusséd' is, to say the least, a vulgar, unlady-like word; or perhaps you won't admit it?"

"Oh!" cried Barbara, with an air of disgusted weariness, "I'll admit anything, if you'll only let me take the rest of my ride in peace."

"There's another charming trait you've developed this afternoon!" he retorted. "You are willing, then, to admit an untruth for the sake of your personal comfort! Jove! I *am* glad to know that! That'll save me a world of bother in future discussions."

"I'm glad to know that I've helped you to a clearer knowledge of my character," she replied, recklessly giving way to the temptation of sarcastic retorts.

Glancing at him, she was overcome with that sense of his ugliness, which during his fits of temper, seemed to her to blot out every vestige of good looks, from face and figure. His whole presence revolted her. She shivered and settled herself more firmly in the saddle. "If he will only content himself with sulking and let me alone," she thought, wearily. "He does make me so wicked! My tongue stings like an adder, after he has goaded me beyond a certain length of time. Oh, if he will only let me alone! It is so horrible! When he is like this I don't love him. I long to get away from him. What have I done to rouse this mood in him? Let me think." She went over everything that had passed between them for a month, but without arriving at any solution of his present frame of mind.

"Of course you know what the world will say?" he began, so abruptly that she started and changed color.

"What?" she asked, with some vagueness.

"Why, they'll say I'm tired of you and in love with Mrs. Leland."

"Oh, Jock, how vulgar!" breathed Barbara, her eyes full of disgust rather than anger. "Don't you know that if I could think such things of you I should stop loving you?"

"I really don't know what you'd do under given circumstances, my dear. You've turned out, in nearly everything, the exact opposite of what you seemed before marriage,—cold, prudent, selfish, conventional, a baby-worshipper, a shrew, a——"

"I won't listen to such words!" cried Barbara, her eyes in a flame.

"And pray, my dear, how will you prevent my expressing my sincere opinions? You cannot strike me

with dumbness, because what I say puts you in a rage, can you? I repeat it. You've turned out a shrew and a scold and I——"

But Wilful had sprung two lengths ahead, under a sudden touch of her heel, and was sending back the sticky soil in showers.

"Oh, that's your game, is it? You vixen!" ground out Dering. He slashed the bay savagely with his cutting whip, and for a moment the two galloped abreast. He laughed exultantly.

"Did you really think you could ride away from me in that style, you mad thing!" he chuckled. "I'll tell you, then, there's something in the way one rides as well as in one's mount, and you'll find that a poor way of trying to escape me. You saucy vixen, you!"

"Ah, Wilful, off with you, sweetheart!" cried Barbara.

Dering gave a gasp of mingled rage and astonishment, for, gathering his strong legs under him, the great chestnut swept past and on down the slanting road, like a streak of fire. As they flew, Barbara turned her white face, and, lifting her whip, waved it mockingly. All the brute was up in Dering. He desired only to overtake, to conquer, to crush. He saw, in the graceful figure ahead of him, not the woman loved through happy hours, but an insolent and defiant force which must be mastered and compelled into the direction which he desired it to take. The bay's sleek hide was streaked with weals from his whip, and it pounded on with all the speed in its power. Wilful, however, fleet and light as a deer, steadily increased the distance between them until, with an oath, Dering pulled up, seeing that pursuit was useless. Then Barbara soothed Wilful into a walk and waited until Dering came up

with her. He was too breathless between rage and the pace at which he had been going to speak for some time.

Finally he said, with shut teeth,—

"You'll be sorry for this."

"Oh, Jock," she returned, wearily, "don't threaten. You know that I am not afraid of anything in the world, and that nothing could make me afraid."

"Upon my soul," he exclaimed, "there's something monstrous about you! You're not like a woman. You are like some curious mythological creature. Have you got any heart or blood in you? Heaven help your child! I tremble when I think it's mine, too. It will probably live to curse me and bring disgrace upon my name!"

"You are beside yourself," said Barbara, quietly. "I forgive you, because I am sure that you don't know what you are saying, but I tell you again that I will not listen. If you go on, I shall ride off again."

"You will, will you? You fury!" he cried, making a lunge at her rein; but she was a perfect horsewoman. Easily avoiding him, she again gave Wilful his head, and, delighted at this game of racing in short heats, he was off and away with a purring snort of pleasure.

When Barbara again allowed Dering to come up with her, they were both silent for some moments. At last she said, in a low voice,—

"Jock, don't let us quarrel any more. I am sorry if I have said anything to provoke you, and I know you did not mean the things you said to me just now. Married life is so dreadful if such bitter words are spoken. Somehow one can never quite get over them. They are like ink-spots on a white gown. Either the stain is never completely done away with, or some-

thing has to be used which injures the stuff. Either one forgives without forgetting, or forgets because one ceases to care."

She looked at him earnestly, pleadingly, her heart beating fast, her hand stretched out. For a moment the truth of these words changed Dering's mood. Then his face congealed into its former hardness and he answered in a cold voice,—

"Perhaps you think I don't see your woman's trick of shifting your ground. It was a very clever move, but I am not to be hoodwinked that way. You must have had pretty soft fools to manage before you met me."

Barbara's face hardened also, and she pressed her lips together in order to keep back a stinging reply.

"I'm not the type of husband, let me tell you once for all," continued Dering, "who thrives on hen-pecking. Now that I see you care more for that helpless bundle at home than you do for me, I shall retire gracefully. You needn't fear that I will annoy you further. I shall, of course, accept the Lelands' invitation and go West with them. I can't tell when I'll be back. I'll send you my address from Washington."

He paused as if waiting for her to answer, and she said in a voice as cold as his own,—

"Very well. I hope that you will have a pleasant trip."

"Thank you," he replied.

They passed the rest of the ride in silence.

XXVII.

The only thought which presented itself clearly to her, in this disturbed seething of her mind, was that she must get away from the house—from every one—to that deep loneliness of nature which had always seemed to her, in wild moments, like a tranquil hand upon her heart.

She did not ring for Rameses, but took off her habit with nervous haste and drew on her short walking-skirt and mountain-boots. As she stole swiftly and noiselessly along the winding corridors she felt, as she had so often done in a bad dream, as if she were being drawn backward; as if some hand might catch and detain her; as if Dering were about to step before her from some dark closet or turning. At last, however, she was out in the large air of the winter day. Already the sun was trailing after him the languid shadows of his westering course. The ploughed fields showed a soft feathering of young oats, and great clods, smooth from the ploughshare, crumbled like nuggets of burnt gold in the level glare. Clouds, delicate, transparent, rosy-white, meshed the dim azure of the sky. Here and there came a bleak glimmer of snow from some violet shadow. The soft trill-like drip of thawing snow upon dead leaves made a sweet whisper throughout the winter wood. Above, the heavens were hung between the mist of branches like a great blue cobweb. She heard some fox-hounds, far up the mountain-side, swell their deep plaintive notes, and turning into a little path that zigzagged upward among the under-

brush, quickened her steps in the direction of their baying.

A chill fragrance from the damp junipers soon enveloped her, and the patches of snow grew thicker and broader. She saw upon this white carpet the marks of bird's feet, the print of little hoofs. It seemed to her, in the exhilaration of climbing, that some baby faun might have scampered away into the distant mist of soft, gray, leafless stems. The acorn which he had been nibbling lay there beside the hoof-prints. Morsels of yet unmelted snow clung here and there to the dark cedar boughs like drowsy white birds. Even the moist red clay had a clean perfume of its own, and a hare, warily stealing towards a baited trap, paused, quivered up on its haunches, and displaying its sleek breast and fine-veined ears, fixed on her its liquid eyes. Then all at once, terrified, alert, drummed quickly with its strong hind feet, and whirling, leaped away into the tangled weeds.

Her heart began to beat quickly now and her breath came fast. She was on the steepest flank of the mountain, and the narrow path which she followed wound far above her head. But the keenness of her mental suffering seemed a force which impelled her body onward. As long as she forced her supple muscles into energy the tumult in her soul seemed quieted. She grew so warm that, as she walked, she drew off her jacket and threw it across her shoulder. The heated blood throbbed stinging through her veins, and the exultation of sheer physical life grew upon her with each powerful movement. Presently the quick panting ceased. She closed her lips and breathed easily; took off her white *beret* and ran her fingers through her damp hair. The air made a cool streak across her

forehead. It was like the kiss of some invisible but friendly presence. Already that efficient calm of mountain solitude was upon her. Already the valley, with its troubled life, seemed vague, distant, remote, apart; its purplish mist, like the vapors which arise from weird, untranquil dreams; the harsh note of a distant locomotive, like the cry of some unfortunate, half lapped in the incomplete unconsciousness which begets such visions. She thought of those melodious words which ever sing themselves to a silent music of the mind,—

> "Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height,
> For love is of the valley, come thou down."

"No, no!" she said, aloud. "True love is of the heights." And then started with that strange self-consciousness which overpowers one, at the sound of one's own voice falling upon solitude. She paused and leaned for a moment against a tree to rest. Her collie, who had rushed ahead, came up and gazed at her, panting. The crisp white of a snow-streak near by suggested thirst, and he dashed his sharp muzzle along its crust and gobbled a mouthful or two, then looked eagerly up at Barbara again, who gave her girlish laugh, and stooping gathered a handful, which she ate daintily. Her blood, changed by the vigorous exercise of the last half-hour, was ready to receive new impressions. This plentiful silence pressed against her, charged with myriad suggestions. The soft hand was upon her heart.

In Barbara there was much of that bounteous Pagan spirit which first stirred the world to belief in the soul permeating all things. To her each leaf, each

transient cloud, each shadow traced in varying light, each fluctuating splendor of the day had its individuality, its message, its conscious being, as of what we call spirit. To her the friendly silence was, at the same time, comprehending. There seemed to rise a courage and consolation to her from the strong, bitter smell of the damp earth. The wind, seizing her roughly by hair and garments, was more sympathetic than the alien presence of another human being. The forward leap of a swollen mountain stream beat sharp and true upon a like chord in her heart,—its rush, its turbidness, its savagery, she had felt them all. When a bird alighted near her, unafraid, even ventured to peck at the branch of scarlet berries which she had broken off, from the mere child-wish to have its beauty with her on her lonely walk, she was faint with pleasure at its sweet confiding, and feared to breathe, lest she should frighten it from her. If, by some magic, she could have thrown herself into its being, how quickly she would have mastered its loves, its dreads, its pleasures! How, as a girl, this desire to be one with the all-spirit had possessed her! She had longed to be a thousand different women, to pass through a thousand experiences, happy and sorrowful, to exhaust, by a series of brilliant existences, every world in space, to feel all, see all, know all, possess all,—laughter, wretchedness, despair, glory, failure, victory, beauty. She had tried to imagine how the growing flowers felt, the trees, the humming-birds swinging in the crape-myrtle bells. How huge everything must have looked to them! How intensely they must have felt! She would have liked to suck the very essence of life, in a few hours of vivid frenzy. As a bird, she would have flown until her wings failed and she had dropped swift

and straight into the sea below, or dashed her head against the great glass of some glaring light-house.

This old mood caught and shook her to the soul. A blind despair of longing for her dead maidenhood overrushed her. She put both arms about the huge bole of the tulip-tree against which she leant and pressed her lips to its rough bark. In her heart were some such thoughts as these: "Dear tree! If I were only a Dryad, and, folded in your fragrant rind, could listen to the stealthy pulsing of the sap through your great boughs, and grow glad with the spring which will make you green again; if, resting so, a part of you as your young leaves will be, I could feel with you the thrill of the midnight storm, the clutching feet of frightened birds, the palpitations of close-scrambling squirrels; in the morning the clash of your ice-coated branches, glittering golden through the fresh sunlight. At sunset to be warmed gloriously and drowned in sheets of flame-color. To rest, to sleep, to live in you and with you, and then, freeing myself in certain hours of liberty, to range the voiceless woods, unafraid of snow or storm, secure in delicate emotions, incapable of disturbance!"

All this, wildly and chaotically massed, surged through her, as she clung to the great tree, her tears first warming and then chilling her flushed face. While she paused there, however, a gray flag of cloud had been unrolled above. There was a shiver of wind throughout the forest. A drop fell upon her outstretched hand,—another, yet another. But suddenly the wind veered and tore an oval space in the steaming air above,—a rift of blue sky shone serenely as a gem, widened into placid magnificence, possessed the upper day. That strong, eager life-joy welled ever higher in

Barbara. Her red lips were parted. Her eyes were eager as Robin's, who leaped and circled in front of her like her keen mood made visible.

Now the baying of the hounds rang out again,—first near at hand, then growing fainter and fainter in the distance. She reached a primitive fence, made of a rail or two stuffed with underbrush, and in a bound was over, Robin close at her heels. The trees were growing thinner, and dwindled finally into plantations of sassafras, with here and there the glossy green plume of a scrub pine. All at once she found herself in a steep open field, covered with rustling yellow broom, which came into exquisite contrast with the floating clouds beyond. Above, on the comb of the hill, was a bristling of purple sassafras-bushes against the white-blue sky, their stems hidden by the rich broom-straw, which grew above her shoulders. The dim red path wound up and up, and all about was that dry, seething sound, followed by a soft rattle in the limbs of the stunted pear-tree springing from a pile of stones. Here and there velvety scarlet pyramids of sumac-berries burnt on their blue-gray stems. The far valley was like a pale-lilac cloth spread smoothly. It seemed to melt away at last and to become absorbed in space. Above, the small, round, overlapping clouds were like the shells on a broad beach, and they were suggested again by the little ovals of snow clustering in the shadows of the hill-side. A golden robin on a sassafras-tree, near her foot, turned its head sideways and peered up at her, half its brilliant speck of eye hidden by the bluish lower lid. A pregnant and spacious silence floated on every side. Barbara drew a long breath, and sinking on her knees stretched out her young, vigorous arms, as though yearning over the sorrowful

world which lay spread out beneath her. In those throbbing moments she realized why Christ had withdrawn upon mountains to pray. The noble outlines of the dumb, majestic peaks about her were themselves like petrified prayers. Here upon this great crest a purer air came winnowing in, a holier light seemed to diffuse itself from the near heavens. Here there was only the soothing acquiescence of nature, the bounteous and unobtrusive peace which hallows the dwellings of humble creatures, whose lives are passed in such loneliness, and who are content to know the distant valley only as a great chess-board with squares of amethyst and carnelian glimmering mysteriously through a lawny haze. She seemed to have left her anger, her rebellion, her despairing grief all there under the roof of Rosemary, which she saw with its clustering out-houses glittering like a handful of pearl-colored pebbles among its smoke-like trees, far below her. Her heart contracted, as she thought of returning to it. Unfastening her heavy hair, she plunged her fingers into its masses and let the wind streak coolly through it. There was only the golden robin, the sheer air, the rustling broom-field, her dog, to witness this unconventionality. She laughed to feel the strong gusts combing out her loose locks behind her like a gleaming pennon. She felt enveloped by a sweet friendliness of things animate and inanimate, and as though she had grown backward, reaching again her blithe girlhood. Even Valentine was like some quiet hero, of whom she had read in a jewelled book of fairy-land,—Dering and her child part of an uneasy dream. She was sixteen, as she lay there among the feathery stalks of broom, her hands clasped beneath her head, her hair blowing loose about her. It seemed

to her that she was on the prow of a great ship which was plunging onward through billows of golden air.

Then presently she got to her feet, twisted up her hair, and, calling to Robin, began to climb again, for the summit of the mountain was not yet reached. The path now broadened into a road which, skirting the edge of a thick wood, brought her finally to another fence. Beyond this lay a cornfield, from which the meadows below looked of a soft gray rose color. Still farther hung a curtain of bluish mist, and against this mellow background the stripped corn-stalks lifted their tufts of faded orange leaves. The furrows were still striped with snow. Through this meadow Barbara and Robin went running until they came to a sharp declivity, down which the road plunged boldly, to rise again on a hill-side, steeper than any yet, its top outlined by another fence and the gray puffs of leafless apple-boughs. When they had climbed this, however, Barbara, leaning breathless against the lichened rails, looked down into an unfamiliar valley, and saw, like a wall of lapis-lazuli austerely carved against the soft pale air, the vague and spiritual beauty of the Blue Ridge.

A man was ploughing on the hill-crest opposite. The horses moved in patient silhouettes, urged on by his wailing cries. Something glistened on the fence not far from her. She looked at it more closely, and saw that it was a dead black-snake trailed limply over the top rail. Some negro had put it there as a sure charm for the long-needed rain. Barbara smiled sadly and shook her head, as she thought of poor monkeys crucified by the Hill tribes of India for the same purpose as that which had prompted this Virginian

darky to kill a snake and hang it on the fence which bore its name.

But now the sky began to pulse with a faint rose hue, the call of nestward birds trembled overhead,—there was that faint, unmistakable stirring through wood and field which is nature's preparation for the calm of night. Barbara wished to see the sun set from the broom-grown hill which overlooked her own well-loved valley. Something in the unfamiliarity of this vast beauty made her sorrowful. She turned and trudged quickly over the slippery snow-clogged roads, until she was once more in the field of broom, with only the great, undulating plains between her and the open sea. She called Robin, and with her arm about him waited for that puissant change which makes the magic of the sky. Above spread a lustrous sheet of beryl-colored air, seen through a filigree of clouds, gray, diaphanous, tinged at their edges with a warm gold. Underneath, a deep-blue mystery of vapor was piled from east to west, as though in imitation of the mountains from which she had just turned away. In this a beamy opening sent forth suddenly shafts of light and revealed what seemed to be an endless waste of molten brass, its tunnelled waves breaking in fiery spume even above the edge of the sombre wall.

The space of tremulous pale green above died into a dim saffron. Little by little the molten brass changed into lead. The glowing door was shut. Upon the level sadness of the far east the full moon balanced like a plaque of silver. A star gleamed here and there with vacillations of green, of red, of orange. Now a white steam rolled upward with the calm moon on its breast. Again came the sensation of being on the prow of a great ship. The ship was the world. It

seemed sailing steadfastly through those volumes of cool mist. The darkness began to gather with its undulations of gloom, of unfamiliar sound, of penetrating odors. The eerie trilling of an owl fell through the thickening air, and once more the baying of the hounds came faintly from the valley. Suddenly the terror of vast and spacious darkness clutched at Barbara's heart. She started to her feet and gazed about her. The trees no longer seemed friendly, but their dark tracery against the sky was a wizard-writing full of evil. Those surges of wan vapor seemed in her wild thought like a condensation of ghosts, and the owl's cry shivered along her overstrained nerves in a sinister warning. Holding Robin convulsively by the collar, she started down the steep path.

"Ah, my God!" she said aloud, after a while, panting for breath, "I am so lonely! I have tried so hard! He will be harsh and stern to me, when I come in. I have only my child. Show me my duty to her. I cannot leave her, even if it makes him angry with me forever. Let me teach her to be a wiser, calmer, happier woman than I have ever been."

The moon bloomed suddenly into full splendor, and the fine tracery of the cedar tassels was thrown upon the snow. That convulsive spasm of dread released her, and a strong sense of the beneficence of nature distilled itself again through her whole being. She walked rapidly, but calmly, trying not to think, but to absorb strength for the coming struggle. Once she stopped. It was to lift the rough wooden door of a hare-trap and let scamper the frightened creature within, but she left in its place one of those loose coins which she always carried with her on all her rambles. Somehow the thought of the hare which she had

restored to liberty cheered all her mood. She had learned to regard freedom as so infinite a compensation for most ills, that, to her, even the bondage of a hare seemed not without consequence in the general scheme of existence.

XXVIII.

During the next two or three days Fair seemed to be so much better that Barbara was very puzzled as to what course to take in regard to the matter of going West with the Lelands. She felt that Dering would have a right to be angry with her, if, from a vague anxiety, she allowed him to set off alone when Eunice would so gladly take charge of Fair.

The next night, while lying awake, in the vain endeavor to decide upon what to do, a sudden thought took possession of her, and, jumping out of bed, she threw on her dressing-gown, lighted a candle, and wrote the following letter to Bishop Cammersell:

"My dear Bishop,—You told me so often during your visit to Eunice, last month, that you wished me to come to you in any trouble, that I am writing to you now for counsel. Indeed, dear bishop, I am so bewildered and unhappy that I cannot see clearly and am utterly confused about my real duty. My little girl has been seriously ill with diphtheritic sore-throat, and the doctor tells me that she is liable to other attacks all during the winter.

"Now, my husband is very anxious for me to go West with him on a pleasure-party arranged by some

friends, and, of course, I wish to do this if possible, especially as several things have occurred which may make it a serious question, and involve much unhappiness for us both, in the future, if I am forced to refuse him. But I cannot bear to leave Fairfax, even in the charge of Eunice, because I feel that if anything should happen to her I could never get over it. Besides, I suppose that a mother always feels that she can do for her child what no one else in the world can. If, however, you tell me that this is merely a mother's over-anxiousness, and that the sensible and right thing is to go with my husband, I will do as you say. I feel that I am incapable of judging impartially in this matter and that Eunice, being herself a very nervous mother, could not help me. It is for this that I turn to you, dear bishop, for you have had children yourself, and must often have felt as harassed as I feel now. I wish only to be shown my duty. When I see it I will do it, no matter what it costs me. Thanking you beforehand, dear bishop, for what I know will be your wise and helpful answer,

"I remain always,

"Yours most sincerely,

"BARBARA DERING."

For seven days Barbara examined eagerly each post that came to Rosemary in search of Bishop Cammersell's reply, but in vain. On the eighth morning she rode Wilful over to The Poplars and asked Eunice what she thought of his silence. They decided that he could not have received the letter, and Barbara was forced to rely on her own judgment. As Fair was again feverish on Monday, she told Dering finally that she could not go, and on Tuesday he knocked at her

bedroom door and gave her a cool touch on her cheek for good-by. She ran after him.

"Oh, Jock! don't let us part like this! We can never tell what may happen! Won't you say you understand how I feel,—that you know I would go with you if I could?"

"I don't perceive any shackles about you, now that I examine you attentively," said Dering. "You aren't rooted to the ground, as they say in books, are you?" He laughed and lighted a cigar. Still the woman in Barbara whispered foreboding and she clung to his arm.

"Oh, won't you give me a loving kiss, dear?" she pleaded, her eyes wet. "Dear, you must know how I love you. If anything happened to me, you would suffer so."

"'Her majesty myself' to the last, eh?" he said.

Stung to the quick she loosed his arm, and Dering, blowing her a mocking kiss from his finger-tips, ran down-stairs.

As days went by and still nothing was heard from Bishop Cammersell, Eunice, who happened to be in Ashleigh, called on the bishop. He was just going out, but took off his hat and cloak and carried her back to his study, where a fire of sea-coal shimmered in an open grate. One of his nine daughters, a slim, fashionably-dressed young woman, with a great deal of flaxen hair and her father's silky blue eyes, came in and brought Eunice a cup of tea, then, with a few pretty words of excuse, left them alone.

"Bishop," said Eunice, with her usual quiet frankness, going at once to the point, "I want to ask you about a letter that Barbara Dering wrote you two weeks ago. It was a very important letter, and she

looked for your answer with a great deal of anxiety. Did you ever receive it?"

The bishop stroked his mildly-retreating chin, and giving his gentle smile, answered, in an explanatory tone,—

"Well, you see, my dear child, it is a very delicate and even a dangerous matter to answer such letters. I do not believe in interfering between husband and wife, my child. They have accepted each other for better for worse. Such questions are always very painful and embarrassing."

Eunice sat looking at him calmly with her steadfast eyes, but her color deepened. "Then you did receive the letter?" was all that she said, when the bishop stopped speaking. He looked confused and rather uncomfortable, but again smiled benevolently.

"Yes, my dear, I did receive your friend's letter, but I did not think it wise to answer it. A wife should decide such questions for herself. Mr. Dering would have every right to be angry with me if I had meddled in his private affairs."

Eunice was silent, smoothing and buttoning her little gray *suède* glove. The bishop continued with restored suavity, being accustomed to take silence for consent,—

"You see, my dear child, it is on these impulsive and excitable natures that the discipline of marriage has the most beneficial influence. Your friend will be a much better, wiser, more resigned and Christian woman for being left to settle such questions for herself, with the aid of earnest prayer; and pardon me for wounding you, my dear child, but I have been intending to speak to you on this subject ever since my visit to you in the early autumn. I am sure, from careful observation,

my dear, that you indulge and subordinate yourself too much to your friend. True, she is very winning and delightful, but strangely erring and misguided in many ways. Besides, you have your own gifts to cultivate. Many people have told me of your very lovely voice. We should not neglect the talents that a Gracious Father has seen fit to bestow upon us, my dear. How sweet it would be if you could train and lead a fine choir in that pretty Gothic church which every one admires! The music which they now have is painful even to my uncultivated ears. Why not consecrate your beautiful voice to its loving Creator and rejoice the hearts of the congregation? Let your friend rely more upon her own strength,—your duty is to yourself, your husband, your children, and your own gifts. Do not spend so much of your precious time with her. Remember that we must each work out our salvation with fear and trembling." He paused, his placid lips wreathed by his most engaging smile, his tremulous blue eyes fixed yearningly upon her. But Eunice, her face pale and chill, rose to her feet and stood looking at him, without making any movement to meet his outstretched hands. Then she said, slowly, deliberately,—

"Bishop, I have only one question to ask you. Do you think that if our Lord had been upon earth, and received such a letter as Barbara wrote you, he would have left it unanswered?"

The bishop's rosy cheeks grew rosier, and he smoothed his chin after his manner when slightly puzzled or embarrassed.

"Er—such a letter would scarcely be addressed to our Lord, my dear," he replied, finally.

"Such prayers are often addressed to Him," said Eunice, coldly. "And we are taught that no prayer

remains unanswered, whether as we would have it or otherwise. No matter if your answer had been harsh and uncomprehending, it would have been better than none. You are a Father of our Church, bishop. Do you think in your inmost heart that you have treated Barbara Dering as a father would treat a cherished daughter?—as Christ would have treated her? The reasons that you have given me would be cold-hearted in a layman, how much more in a high-priest of God! I must bid you good-by, bishop. I dare not say to you what is in my heart." With a quick movement she left the room, and a few moments later found herself walking rapidly down the broad village street, without knowing in what direction. Eunice's nature was naturally orthodox and easily guided, but the dialogue in which she had just taken part caused in her a strong reaction. She recalled the words which speak of there being One only Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, and regretted, in her sudden revulsion of ideas, that it was considered necessary to approach Him through the medium of bishops, priests, and deacons. How much sweeter it was to speak to Him directly, looking up into the deep blue of the sky! How much more solemn sounded the still, small voice now whispering in her heart than the unctuous tones of Bishop Cammersell! How much easier it was to approach Him in spirit, than bodily through the conventional means of weekly church-going! She walked on faster and faster, until at last arrested by the bright face of a little girl, who was leaning against a gate arranging her school-books more satisfactorily under her arm.

"Who lives here, dear?" asked Eunice, more for want of something to say than from any real desire to know.

"Oh, don't you know?" exclaimed the child, starting away from the gate and looking frightened. "I thought ev'ybody in Ashleigh knew that! It's the black-eyed minister's house!"

This mysterious announcement only made Eunice laugh gently. The child looked up at her, also smiling.

"And who is the black-eyed minister?"

"Oh, he's a good man, they say, but dreadful cross an' hard. He thinks God's always mad with ev'ybody. An' his church is so bare an' cold all the old ladies get rheumatism, but they go, 'cause when folks *do* love the black-eyed minister they love him real hard. But mother'n' me we love Bishop Cammersell! He's jes' like the Lord Jesus in the picture, an' his smile is jes' lovely! An' when he says, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me,' after Sunday-school, all the gyrls cry. An' one day he said that about a 'cup of cold water in the name of the Lord' when I took him a gourdful from our spring, an' I couldn't help cryin' myself. Ev'ybody's jes' wild 'bout him. An' oh, he's got such beautiful white curls, an' his daughters do dress so stylish! Mother says they get their clothes from New York. An' he's always preachin' 'bout heaven; but the black-eyed minister *he* preaches most 'bout hell." She stopped, out of breath, her chubby face glowing, the red tape which fastened her slate-pencil to her slate wrapped so tightly about her fore-finger that the flesh between its cross-work was of a yellow-white.

A sudden idea took possession of Eunice. Kissing her informant, much to that small creature's surprise, she opened the gate and went up the narrow brick walk to the black-eyed minister's house.

It was a large stuccoed building with a square porch supported on four brick piles. Over one end of this porch a bare honeysuckle-vine swayed about in the winter air. Two green tubs, on either side of the wooden steps, held stunted cactus plants. She could see behind the shining window-panes dark-red curtains parted as primly as the hair in an old-fashioned portrait. There was no door-bell or knocker, so opening the green Venetian blinds which protected the front door, she rapped against its panels with the handle of her umbrella. A round-faced colored girl in a checked blue cotton gown and a big white cap answered the knock, and said her master was at home.

Eunice sat down on a horse-hair sofa in the sitting-room and looked about her. The whitewashed walls bore the marks of the brush, and there were family photographs in oval, mahogany frames hung at regular distances over the mantel-piece. Three chairs, also covered with black horse-hair, were ranged against the walls. There was a marble-topped table, on which rested a handsome old edition of "Pilgrim's Progress," a large Bible bound in calf, and a calendar set in ebony. A rectangular bronze clock ticked hoarsely in the centre of the mantel-shelf, and on either side of it was a tall bronze candlestick from which rose a tallow candle.

The room was very cold and Eunice did not unfasten her jacket, but sat with her hands in her muff, trying to imagine the black-eyed minister's outward appearance by studying the photographs in the mahogany frames.

Suddenly the door opened, and an immense man appeared on the threshold, fixing on her his sunken, but piercing eyes. On his gaunt frame hung a suit of

rusty black, his dark hair, short and straggling, showed a gray thread here and there. His clean-shaven face was crossed by haggard lines. His lips were but a firm line above his massive chin. The contrast of his appearance to that of Bishop Cammersell was as striking as though a pennon of black crape were to be set floating from an iron stanchion against a rosy apple-tree. He coughed before speaking, and then said,—

"My servant did not mention your name, madam."

"I am Eunice Bransby,—Mrs. Godfrey Bransby," said Eunice, a little nervously. "I do not even know your name, sir. I have a friend who is in great need of advice, and I was told that a minister lived here. I hope that you won't think I took a liberty."

He made no direct answer to this appeal, but said, in his bell-like voice,—

"My name is George Macfarlane, and I am an Episcopal minister. Tell me to what denomination you belong, madam."

"I am an Episcopalian," replied Eunice, shyly, beginning to understand why people preferred dapper Bishop Cammersell to this iron-visaged priest. His face relaxed somewhat, and he said,—

"Come to my study. We can speak more privately there, and I will have a fire lighted."

Eunice followed him over the worn oilcloth of the narrow hall, and opening a door to the left he showed her into his study, then called the negro girl, who lighted two or three shavings of pine-wood under a lump of coal and left them to their fate, without the aid of a blower.

The contrast between the bishop's study and that of Mr. Macfarlane was as complete as that of their personalities. The former room, thickly curtained and

carpeted, had walls hung in embossed leather, a luxurious carved writing-table, lounging-chairs deeply cushioned, sofas, footstools, bookcases lined with every volume that could edify or instruct an Episcopal prelate's mind. Here there were several stiff-backed wooden seats, an uncushioned arm-chair covered with carpeting, dark-green shades on rollers, an old oak table, and a pine bookcase not more than half filled with volumes, whose dingy covers showed that they had been long in their owner's possessions. Over the mantel-piece hung a map of the Holy Land, and resting against the wall, just beneath it, was a crayon drawing of an old lady, who looked like Mr. Macfarlane, in a widow's dress and cap.

Eunice could not help smiling, as she glanced up at it, but, seeing that he regarded her gravely, reassumed a serious expression.

"Now, madam," he said, placing one of the wooden chairs for her and taking another himself. "If you will tell me your friend's trouble I will try to advise her; but first I should like to know why she did not come herself. Is she ill?"

"She does not know that I intended seeing any one for her to-day," answered Eunice; "but she wrote to—to another minister, who never answered her letter."

"Did he receive it?" said Mr. Macfarlane.

"Yes."

"And was it a letter asking for advice?"

"Yes."

"A respectful letter?"

"It was a noble, simple, touching letter, sir," said Eunice, earnestly. "I read it before my friend posted it. In it she asked as humbly as a child to be shown

her duty. She said that when she knew what it was she would do it, no matter at what cost to herself."

"And you are sure that it was received?"

"Perfectly sure. I went myself to see the person to whom it was written, and the only reasons he gave for not answering it were that it was a very delicate and dangerous matter to interfere between husband and wife, and that, had he done so, my friend's husband would had just cause to be angry with him. He also said that wives ought to know how to decide such questions for themselves."

Mr. Macfarlane's face grew sterner and sterner, but when she finished speaking, all that he said was,—

"And now tell me the cause of your friend's trouble."

Eunice told him in as few words as possible, and when she finished he looked at her with eyes softened by a great kindliness.

"You may tell your friend for me," he then said, "that I am glad in these days of careless motherhood to hear of a young woman who, in spite of such painful obstacles, sees her duty so clearly and performs it so bravely. It would indeed be better for a mother to have a millstone hanged about her neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea than to offend a little one whom God has given into her keeping, body and soul. If your friend is in further perplexity of any sort, I hope that she will come to me. At least I will give her my honest counsel, without thinking of the unpleasant consequences which it may bring upon myself. As for you, madam, your love for your friend is very beautiful, and the feeling which exists between you is a holy and blessed thing which you cannot prize too highly or thank God for too earnestly. I hope that this chance meeting may grow in a fuller acquaint-

ance, madam, and I assure you again of my hearty approval of your friend's conduct."

Eunice thanked him again and again, and when they parted at the door he took her hands in his and said, with deep gentleness,—

"I may have seemed cold to you, my child. My manner has always been a source of regret to me; but you have my blessing. I thank God that I have been of service to you."

Eunice looked up into the dark eyes with a sensation of tears behind her own. As she went down the rickety wooden steps she had lost all sense of his hardness, and could readily believe that "when folks did love the black-eyed minister they loved him real hard."

XXIX.

THREE weeks passed before Barbara got a letter from Dering, although she had written to him very regularly. His words were saltless, largely scrawled, and touched only on practical matters. Barbara refolded the cold, thick sheets and put them back into their envelope with a dry sensation at heart and eyes. She had not yet reached what Carlyle calls "the centre of indifference," although she was beginning to feel that its arid calm, as of the central point in a cyclone, might be a safe retreat from the turbulences of her present life.

After a few moments spent quietly at one of the open windows, she ordered Wilful and started upon a long ride.

It was now the middle of April, the air mild as a fairy's breath, the pear-trees one flutter of white blos-

som, the peach-trees frailly rosy, the young leaf-buds on the maples and poplars making a dim green dust between her and the distant horizon. Yellow crocus-tips were just breaking the black garden-mould here and there, and violets crowded damp and pungent under their matted leaves. On the greening hill-sides the sheep moved lazily, their dull-pink wool, tinted by the red soil, melting into the general harmony about them. The incessant bleating of the lambs was punctuated by the sharp "tink-tink" which came from the bell-wether's neck. A hundred different bird-notes thrilled the fluctuant air. The singers whirred their gay wings close to Barbara's cheek, swung head down as though tipsy with sunshine among the honeyed white of the pear-trees, alighted in Wilful's haughty way and were off again before he could send a purring breath of inquiry through his dilated nostrils. Butterflies clear as amber and smoother than satin tilted past on the placid breeze. The spongy soil gave forth a delightful perfume, as of the quintessence of spring. The noise of distant brooks came tremulously to the ear. Underfoot was a dark tangle of periwinkle in which, here and there, a pale blue flower-star glimmered or a toad-stool perked its fat, white stem, on which sat the round umbrella-like top, as daintily browned as a well-made *meringue*. In this part of the lawn white pines grew thickly, and the earth was dank and rich. Wild vines covered the tree-stems and rioted along the ground, in friendly interlacings with the glistening periwinkle trails. Wild strawberries were here in bloom, and here in the scraggy branches of lopped cedars which had died from age, one could see the soft round of nests and the glint of faintly-colored eggs.

When Wilful had jumped the octagon, moss-crusted

rails of the old fence which girdled the grounds, they broke at once, from the twilight of thick evergreens, into the full splendor of the day. There was a wash of lucent gold from east to west. A veil of transparent yet throbbing glory seemed lowered between Barbara's eyes and the wide valley about her. Beyond was the pale-green shimmer of young oats, undulations of deep-red soil breaking the tender monotony, tufty woods, their shadows softened by a vapory azure, thin crests of tall stone-pines glowing dark and bright as splendid emeralds. The red-bud trees made globes of dusky color far away, symmetrical and fragile-looking as though they had been dandelion-balls dyed crimson. The sky was a hood of harebell-tinted silk trimmed lace-like with pale clouds.

Barbara rode on and on, breathing deep of the generous air, and feeling with a healthful pleasure the elastic movements of her horse. She was in perfect accord with the fertile beauty of the day and season, and her own glowing loveliness struck no note of contrast, but was rather an accentuation of the vivid wonders about her. She came finally to a branching road which ran southward through a belt of timber towards what was called "the flat woods." And while she hesitated, Wilful, as though deciding for her, wheeled suddenly and began to gallop along this level way. At first she frowned and tried to turn him, but, with a sudden change of mood, urged him on; and so they galloped, for a long while, through the spring forest, which was softly green overhead and fragrant with the breath of wild azaleas. At length the railway was crossed, and they were well on their way to the different country which lay beyond the flat woods. Between Barbara's brows was the little crease which,

with her, always meant determination. After they had gone about eight miles she drew up, beside a broad willow-edged stream and let Wilful pick his way carefully down the bank and thrust his muzzle deep into the lazy water. As he drank, a little flotilla of white geese sailed gently up across the silver reflections of the willows, out-dazzling the radiant clouds above. Their deep-orange bills seemed almost like flames darting from their sleek heads, and on this fiery yellow the small nostrils looked like specks of jet. A bird shook the willow-branch near her with its swift alighting and began its cheery call. As a child, Barbara had fancied that it said, "We greet you! We greet you! We greet you! Now! Now! Now! Now!"

She looked up in time to see its glistening breast and delicate claws before it flew off glittering like a bit of spun glass in the fresh glare, then Wilful, having sighed deeply, in token that he was content and ready to start, they went on along the now level roads.

A half-hour more of trotting and cantering, varied by a steady walk now and then, brought them to a huge old gate of wrought-iron, swung between granite posts, on the balls of which clung falcons with their wings spread. A tumble-down stone wall, held from utter dilapidation in many places by the strong bands of the Virginia-creeper, ran from this gate to right and left until hidden by hedges of mock-orange. Barbara opened the heavy gate with her riding-crop as though accustomed to its eccentricities, for she was careful to hold the handle of her whip against it until Wilful was well through, when it clanged to again, as though with a spring.

The road was no longer red, but of a gray-white,

and wound along between gently-curving fields, downy with young grass and sometimes dignified by an immense oak, on whose gnarled branches the tender leaves had an inappropriate and frivolous look, sometimes varied by the tall streak of a Lombardy poplar like a Titanic exclamation point against the blond sky. A long avenue of Norway spruces made a dark tunnel through the brilliant wall of the day, and under these Barbara guided Wilful. These trees were very old and grew in fantastic shapes. One was like a vast lyre, another was twisted into a huge S, another resembled the zigzag of the conventional thunderbolts grasped by Zeus in a child's mythology. Their young cones, oozing with sap, hung brightly green among the sombre tassels. Wilful's hoofs struck noiselessly upon the matting of brown tags, or crunched upon the dry resin-tipped cones of last year's growth. A warm, thrilling odor enfolded her, and, through the openings in the dark boughs, little slits of sunlit grass beyond, shone with a jewelled brightness.

At the end of this avenue there was a gate, which opened upon a field of wheat, and in the centre of this field a white oblong gleamed through a railing of iron.

When Barbara reached the gate she slipped down, tied Wilful to one of its posts, and, passing through, closed it as gently as though she were entering the room of a sleeping child. With her habit gathered under one arm and her eyes bent gravely on the narrow path, she walked on towards the white stone. A young larch-tree grew near the iron railing, and as she reached it she saw that some one was standing on the other side, for a white gown showed through the fringe of foliage. This figure was slight and small,

and leaned with one cheek against the hand which grasped the rusty iron above its head. The other hand held a basket of white and blue violets. Beyond was a foam of young pear-trees,—the grass of the enclosure was freaked with their blown petals.

"Kitty?" said Barbara, whispering, and with a certain questioning inflection as though doubtful of her welcome.

The girl turned with a violent start, her face pale, her eyes wide. They looked at each other a moment in silence. Then Barbara made an impetuous movement and caught the other to her breast, kissing her, at the same time, on the cheeks, hair, and forehead.

"Forgive me, Kitty," she said, at last. "You used to love me."

"I have never stopped loving you," murmured the girl, faintly. She was trembling, and her basket of violets lay overturned at her feet. "But why—why——" She broke off and stood devouring Barbara's face with her large eyes, which, although of a soft blue, were strangely like Dering's.

"Why have you come here?" she went on, abruptly. "Are you happy?"

"No, dear," said Barbara, quietly. "But I thought you were in Normandy still at school, Kitty. I thought no one was here but the old servants."

"No. I came last week. Aunt Miriam is with me." Then she added, timidly, "I will go away, Barbara, and—and come back—afterwards, if you wish."

"Thank you, dear Kitty," answered Barbara, in the same still voice. "That will be very sweet of you."

"And the violets,—I should love you to have them," suggested Kitty, shyly. But Barbara shook her head,—

"No, dear, that is your own offering. Those lovely pear-blossoms are all that I could wish. But thank you, darling,—thank you, darling Kitty."

The girl threw herself upon Barbara's breast with a sudden movement.

"Oh, Barbara," she cried, "you love him best! You love him best! I have known it always. I was only a little thing, but I knew you couldn't love another time as you loved him. Tell me it's true, Barbara! Tell me! tell me!"

"It's true, sweetheart," said Barbara, her lips white.

"Oh, thank God!" cried the girl. "Thank God! But how sad! I am very cruel. You must be so miserable, Barbara."

"Not always," answered Barbara, gently. "There are different ways of loving, dear child."

"And you love this one a different way?" asked Kitty, a tinge of jealousy sharpening her voice.

"Yes, dear."

"You do love him, then! Is he good to you?"

"He loves me as he has never loved any one else."

"As you loved Val?"

"No; men don't love like that."

"Val loved you like that. More than that!" cried the girl, with sudden fierceness. "*He* would never have married again. I've heard him say so."

Barbara was silent, her lips still pale.

"Oh, forgive me!" cried Kitty, with a gush of tears. "I have never judged you, Barbara. I—I know how much he was like Val. I shall always love you. I shall never say anything to hurt you again."

Barbara tried to smile in sign of forgiveness, but her parted lips only trembled, and two large tears ran slowly from her lowered eyelids. Kitty kissed them

away, with passionate murmurs of self-reproach, and whispered,—

"I'll leave you now, darling. Stay as long as you wish. I'll keep every one away."

Barbara nodded, and, after one more straining embrace, Kitty turned and ran swiftly along the winding path which led to the avenue of spruce-trees.

When she was out of sight Barbara gathered an armful of the white pear-bloom, and entering the enclosure, went and kneeled beside the white stone. She had taken off her riding-hat, and the April sunshine lighted her hair. After a little while she bent down and kissed the grass which covered Valentine's grave. Then, turning, pressed her lips to the carved letters of his name. She left them there so long that the cold marble grew warm beneath her touch. With one hand she smoothed the long grass as though it had been the coverlet of her child. An irrepressible anguish mingled with a solemn joy rose through her veins until her submerged heart felt as though it must suffocate.

"My darling! my darling! my darling!" she said over and over. "My own! my very own! My first love! my kind love! my best love!" Her tears now fell so fast that her cheeks were wet, as though bathed in rain. There was no sobbing,—only the continual gush, as though from the very fountain of her soul. It seemed to her that she knelt there, in that ecstasy of exquisite pain and tenderness, for a long while. Then, as though remembering a forgotten duty, she began to lay the pear-blossoms very gently upon the mound beside which she knelt, almost as though she feared to waken some one. Afterwards she put her arm about the stone, and leaning her cheek against it, was motionless again. She felt no need of explaining anything, even to her own

heart. She had made a sorrowful mistake, but it was only sorrowful, not wilful, and she felt that her "kind love" would understand, as he had always done. The love that she gave him, so passionately ethereal in its lastingness, immortalized him until he seemed to her a very presence,—as real as the sunlight about her, although as intangible. She had needed the terrible experience of her second marriage to learn the lesson of real love,—that love which is the result of perfect companionship, of mutual reverence, of soul-accord as fine and perfect as that of two instruments keyed to the same pitch, which is as indescribable as perfume, as ineffable as the music heard in dreams; to which passion bears the relation of his sceptre to a king, its color to a flame; which is neither entirely tenderness nor entirely fire, but that royal blending of the two which means completeness; a feeling in which nature becomes divine and divinity natural; which gives wings to the heart, and hallows, by its supreme instinct, every subtlest detail of human life. This love, unknowing, she had given to Valentine,—still gave it to him, chastened and intensified by the anguish she had suffered since his death. But she had also learned to put aside all longing for supreme happiness in her present life. To be supremely strong for the happiness of others was now her heart's desire. In spite of all the pessimism and scepticism of the age, there was in her a wholesome fervor of belief in the final working together of all things for good, an unconquerable voice which spoke lowly in the silence of her soul, and which said 'God is in me and I in Him.' She had determined to put from her all regrets which might weaken her power for good in the world about her. Her love for Valentine must pass from an unutterable sorrow to a mighty

consolation,—an upholding proof of the possibility of idealness in human love. That she was capable of an emotion so pure, so entirely apart from the material, gave her a sense of worthiness at once refreshing and soothing. She honored her nature, which was at the same time so loyal, so courageous, and so wise, for she knew that these quiet hours beside the grave of her first love separated her life into two parts. For the last time she yielded herself to these sorrowful, sweet memories. For the last time she gave up her soul to him. When she turned from that quiet place it would be to take up her life as it was and to bear it unflinchingly until the end.

She knew that in a different way, as she had said to Kitty, she loved Dering, and as she sat there with her cheek against the stone, she was filled with a profound determination to make him happy, to help him to develop what was highest in his nature, to win him utterly by her unfailing sympathy and patience.

The air was cooling. A level glimmer drowsed over the green reaches about her. Once more she pressed her lips to the cold marble, clasping it about with her warm arms, as though it had been a living thing and could respond to her passion of renunciation, of farewell, of forgetfulness. Her thick hair, so easy to uncoil, fell down upon its austere whiteness,—the hair that he had loved! For the first time she sobbed heart-brokenly.

XXX.

It was not until the first week of May that Barbara received from Dering any definite account of his plans. She then learned, to her intense surprise, that he had sailed for Japan with another friend whom he had met in San Francisco, and that the Lelands had already returned to Washington.

A sword-pang went through Barbara's heart. Was she then to lose even the compensation of his love? Must she bear her life without the mere comfort of feeling that she bore it for one who loved her, no matter how harshly? She was bewildered, and sat looking at the letter in her hand and saying, "God help me! God help me!" in a dulled voice. There was no higher human power to whom she felt like turning for advice. At the thought of Bishop Cammersell her strong lip curled. Mr. McFarlane was a high-minded but conventional parson, whose ideas of marriage were probably comprised in St. Paul's pithy saying, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." Several hundred years divided her from the people who lived about her,—from their creeds and customs. Still, she felt that she must make every effort to keep her husband from drifting wilfully or unconsciously into a life of hard isolation. She went and knelt down by Fair, who was brandishing her pretty legs and tugging at the toes of her gayly-colored socks, making little clucking sounds of replete pleasure the while.

"Poor baby! what have *you* got to suffer?" she said, bitterly.

Fair gave a gurgling laugh for reply, and showed her pink gums with a supreme lack of vanity. Her great eyes, feathered with long lashes, glared brilliantly up into Barbara's face.

"My eyebrows, my hair, my forehead,—his eyes and mouth," she murmured on. "What is in store for you? Will you suffer most or make others suffer? As you're a woman-child, poor mite, I suppose it is you who'll have the sharpest pangs."

"A-glee! A-glee! A-glee!" was Fair's response, blotting out her mother's nose and mouth with a down-soft palm. Barbara kissed it as it clutched at her lips, then taking it in her own, played with the fingers, so like pale honeysuckle-buds.

"Oh, you pretty one!" she went on, presently, tears in her wistful eyes. "Perhaps by another cradle, at this very minute, another mother, as unhappy as I am, is wondering over the future of the atom who is to darken all your life. Poor babykin! Poor, pretty babykin! I feel half guilty when I look at you. But oh! if I have learned any wisdom through my own pain, I will try to save you from such tortures,—if you will be saved!" She smiled sadly, sceptically, leaning her head against the railing of the white crib. Fair plunged her released fingers into the heavy coils of hair and jerked them with fierce delight.

"Oh, you cruel little thing!" cried Barbara, starting up, tears of pain succeeding the tears of tenderness. "Are you beginning to hurt me already?"

"A-glee! A-glee!" bubbled Fair, imperturbably, once more attacking the loose toes of her socks, and taking no further notice of her mother.

Barbara went over to the window and stood looking out at the lawn, which was dusted with buttercups.

"How idiotic of me to be hurt by that little creature! And yet I am hurt. I must be more stoical,—I will be. I cannot live in this way. Now, I will be practical and go for a long ride. Ramie dear, order Wilful; and, if you would like to, you shall go with me. You can ride the brown mare."

Rameses, who was a fervent horsewoman, was in an ecstasy of delight. When they started off, she galloped behind her mistress until Barbara turned, with a smile, and beckoned her to her side.

"Now, Ramie dear," she said, "I'm a girl again, and so are you, and we are going to talk like sisters. Isn't it a perfect day? Look at those clouds over there with that curious round hole in them. The sunlight streams through like the spokes of a wheel, doesn't it? Why, how strange! how lovely! There's a little rainbow on one side. Look!"

"Dat's what de colored folks calls a sun-dawg," answered Rameses.

"And what does it mean?" said Barbara.

"Hit means bad weather."

"I never saw it before, did you?"

"Oh, yease'm; an' hit always mean *bad* weather,—dat sun-dawg mean *bad* weather,—he so *beeg*."

"Well, here's a good piece of road. Let's gallop," broke in Barbara, with a sigh.

When they pulled up again, she said, abruptly,—

"Ramie, are you glad or sorry that slavery's over?"

"Why, Miss Barb'ra?"

"Because I'm glad. Those dreadful stories you tell me! I couldn't have borne it. It would have made me so miserable. And yet, when the slaves were happy, they were very happy, weren't they?"

"Some wuz in heaven an' some in hell. Dat wuz de wust of hit," said Rameses, slowly.

"But you?" said Barbara.

"Me? Lor'! Ole miss jes' rottened *me* wid goodness. But shuh! talk 'bout slav'ry, Miss Barb'ra, I'se been a slave an' I'se seen slaves an' I *knows*, an' dis slav'ry uv marriage is de wussest slav'ry in life! Ef I could git free onct, I'd run, ef anybordy call de *name* 'man.'"

Barbara laughed outright. Then she held out her hand affectionately, and Martha Ellen placed in it her slim brown fingers.

"Are you so unhappy, dear?" said Barbara, gently.

"Gawd, *He* knows I'se mizzabul," answered the other, her great eyes brimming over. "I'se ben so true an' kine tuh Tobit, Miss Barb'ra. But shuh! mens ain' got de sense dey bawn wid, nohow. Dat critter Tobit run arter, she jes' ez black an' bony ez a griddle!" Here Martha Ellen's unfailing sense of humor made her show her pretty teeth.

"He isn't worth your little finger," cried Barbara, hotly. "How can you bear it, Ramie?"

"Wommens *has* tuh bear things, somehow, Miss Barb'ra," said the other, concisely. "Dat's how I bears hit."

Barbara was silent for a long while. When she looked about her again she saw that a great cap of clouds was settling over the fields.

"Hit's dat ole sun-dawg," said Rameses.

"And my saddle's turning," replied Barbara. She slipped down and began to investigate, while Martha Ellen held Wilful's bridle. "Good heavens! the girth's broken. What a bore!"

"An' dat's a *bad* storm comin' up," said the other, ominously. "You git up on my hawse, Miss Barb'ra, an' I'll walk an' lead Wilfur."

As they were standing there a rattling of wheels came nearer, and Barbara saw that it was Bransby driving alone in the children's buckboard. He stopped to ask if he could help them.

"I don't know," said Barbara, rather vaguely. "There's going to be a storm, I think, and my horse is afraid of lightning. I wouldn't mind that, though, but the girth is broken, and I haven't a surcingle."

"I tell you what, Miss Barb'ra," ventured Rameses. "Ef Mr. Bransby 'll take you up, I'll lead de hawses tuh Susan Flemin's, over in dat field dere, an' you kin sen' Tobit fur 'em when de stawm's over."

"Yes, do let me drive you home, Mrs. Dering," said Bransby, with an attempt at cordiality.

The clouds were now black and veined with such vivid lightning that Barbara consented, and got into the buckboard. Bransby had no carriage-rugs with him, and Barbara's short, scant habit displayed fully her arched feet in their russet leather riding-boots.

She smiled a little wickedly as she braced them comfortably against the dash-board, remembering how very long poor Eunice was compelled to wear her habit-skirts, and thinking of the wide, old-fashioned trousers which she strapped under her walking-boots. Even this was a concession over which Bransby had winced. As they drove, he so prim and erect, with his neat little hands manipulating whip and reins as daintily as though he had been knitting, the spirit of mischief rose in Barbara, until presently she actually crossed one knee over the other with an air of serene unconsciousness. She saw Bransby's lips tighten and his brows begin to pleat.

"How fortunate that you came along when you did!" she then said, in her sweetest voice. "And what

a——" She cast about in her mind for Dering's most sporting expressions. "What a rattling good 'gee' you've got there!" she ended, glibly.

"Yes, it's an excellent animal," replied Bransby, austerely.

"Rather light of bone, isn't she?" asked Barbara, with a knowing air.

"Of course she is not perfect," said Bransby.

"Jolly good quarters, though!" she went on, calmly. "Fine barrel! Have you named her yet?"

"No; we are discussing the matter now."

"Good gracious!" said Barbara, with elaborate innocence. "Discussing it! Why, there's only one name possible for her!"

"Indeed? And that?" inquired Bransby, stiffly.

"'Ballet-girl,' of course!"

"'Ballet-girl?' But why, if I may ask?"

"Why, on account of those long stockings. It's the only name really,—and so original."

"Er—entirely original," admitted Bransby, with tartness. "But er—er—I prefer short names for a horse."

"Why, call her 'Socks,' then," suggested Barbara. "That's short enough, isn't it?"

"I think I shall let Eunice name her," he replied.

Barbara, who had been searching for her handkerchief during this conversation, discovered an old cigarette-case of Dering's in one of the pockets of her covert-coat. Her eyes gleamed, but she drew it forth demurely and began examining its contents with an air of intense interest.

"Pshaw!" she exclaimed, at last, in a tone of disgust. "They're all broken! What a shame!"

Bransby could not restrain himself any longer.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Dering," he said, in a withheld sort of tone, "but as your friend's husband, as a Virginian, I—I must really advise you not to smoke on the public road."

Barbara, who would as soon have thought of such a thing as of laying Fair on hot coals to secure her immortality, looked up with guileless eyes and said,—

"But why?"

"I do not think your neighbors would understand it. You would be very harshly judged."

"Oh, I am that now," she returned, easily. "Having one's neighbors misjudge one is like breaking a pair of boots. Just at first it pinches a little, but that's soon over. However, I won't vex you by smoking."

"I am extremely indebted to you," said Bransby.

Barbara took in his whole attitude of controlled disgust from the corner of her eyes, and was as malevolently delighted as a child who has played some naughty prank on an unloved elder. Her fertile mind began to devise new schemes for teasing him. A sudden inspiration made her whistle softly. This accomplishment she possessed in a rare degree, and an impassioned aria from "Faust" now fell flutily from her pursed lips. She broke off suddenly, wishing to vary his torture as much as possible, and exclaimed,—

"Patti is to be in Washington next week, and 'Faust' is the first opera in which she sings. Couldn't we make up a party and go to hear her? Eunice would enjoy it so heartily."

"I—er—that is—we never go to the opera," said the uncomfortable Bransby.

"Not go to the opera!" And again she turned to him with that maddening "But why?"

"I disapprove of emotional music."

"You disapprove of Gounod's music?"

"Yes, and of 'Faust' particularly. It is an immoral story, and the music is in a high degree immoral."

"Oh, you are a disciple of Tolstoi!"

"I agree with him in his views regarding such music, assuredly."

"But what is there in the music of 'Faust' that strikes you as immoral?"

"It is too intense,—too—er—er—unnatural. The men and women of to-day do not indulge in such overstrained emotions."

"But they must, if this music rouses such terribly dangerous sensations in them."

She saw his face turn a dull red in the gathering twilight.

"It is useless for us to discuss such matters, Mrs. Dering. Our views are entirely opposed."

"Indeed they are!" breathed Barbara, fervently. Then she began again,—

"So you believe that virtue consists in an absence of emotion."

"I did not say that," replied Bransby, uneasily.

"No, but you implied it. Now I, for my part, think that the more we feel the greater we are, and I have some very good authorities to back me up in this opinion. Gibbon, Mommsen, and Ruskin all agree that genius cannot exist without passion. Life is glorious, and those who feel most live most intensely. To me poor Gretchen's story is one of the tenderest and most touching ever written."

"Indeed?" said Bransby, with thinned lips.

"I see that it disgusts you. If one of your daughters happened to share the fate of poor Olivia Prim-

rose, you would not act as the old vicar did, would you?"

"Mrs. Dering, such allusions are intolerable!"

"I beg your pardon. I was simply stating an imaginary case. But it is really a pity for me to make you dislike me more than you do already, because Eunice is so dear to me."

"Dislike you?" stammered Bransby.

"Yes,—hate me almost. I really think you have indulged in an 'intense emotion' there, Mr. Bransby, and I have been fanning it into a still more fervid glow, during the last half-hour. What a pity! I love Eunice more than any woman in the world, and her husband dislikes me in proportion."

"I—I scarcely know you," murmured the wretched Bransby.

"No; it is instinctive," said Barbara, philosophically. "But perhaps"—she lifted her eyes to his face—"perhaps we might detest each other less, if we knew each other better."

"So you confess that you do not like me, either!" exclaimed Bransby, catching at this straw.

"Why, you must have known that all along," said Barbara, with calmness. "Whatever my faults may be, I am not a hypocrite."

"You think me a hypocrite, I dare say," returned Bransby.

"No; I think you narrow, and—but what is the use? I shall only make you hate me more."

"But I wish to know. Please oblige me by finishing your sentence," said Bransby, with an actual touch of eagerness. "What is it that you think me, besides narrow?"

"Well, cold-blooded," said Barbara; "but you

admire cold-bloodedness, so why should you be vexed?"

There was, in fact, no logical reason why Bransby should feel the intense indignation which overwhelmed him at these words. He did not speak, for some moments. Black clouds now draped three parts of the sky, and only a faint crocus-colored light quivered along the north-east. A wild flag of wind was shaken through the air, and a low noise of thunder rolled heavily overhead. Some birds streamed twittering from a tree close by,

"What a storm it is going to be!" exclaimed Barbara, looking about her. "I don't think we can reach Rosemary in time. The Poplars is nearer."

A blare of thunder shook the darkening air. Again the birds shrieked and circled, and the mare began to snort nervously and twitch her ears.

"Is she lightning-shy?" asked Barbara.

"I don't know," answered Bransby, who was rather pale. "I have only had her a week. But pray don't be alarmed."

"Oh, don't bother," she said, cheerfully. "I was never afraid of horses, or lightning, either. Besides, one wouldn't get much of a fall from this trap."

Bransby gave her an admiring glance, in spite of himself. Her attitude was one of such calm ease and self-confidence, as she sat leaning back, one foot braced in front of her, her arms lightly folded. She was not pale. On the contrary, her color had deepened richly in the strong wind. Her serene eyes were bent upon the ever-narrowing band of yellow glare before them. She looked as composed as a young goddess who had ordered a big thunder-storm for her amusement and was watching its progress from some safe shelter.

"I'm afraid you will be thoroughly drenched," he said, at last. "I've no rugs with me, and I felt a drop on my cheek just then."

"That's nothing," she rejoined, gayly. "I'm neither rheumatic nor consumptive, or, as my old mammy used to put it, I'm not made of salt or sugar, and won't melt. I rather like a good sousing once in a while. Look out!"

A flash of lightning shimmered across the northern sky, and the mare reared and plunged frantically for a second or two. Barbara clinched her hands, in her effort to resist the impulse to take the reins from Bransby's incapable-looking little fingers, but he managed somehow to pull things together, and they went on again.

"If we can only make the first gate, before it gets quite dark we'll be all right," she said, in her cheery voice, which was such a contrast to his agitated, wrinkled little face.

"Ah, yes, yes, so we will! That is the gate now, isn't it? And open, too?"

The darkness had closed down as suddenly as a black cloth thrown over a cage. They could not see an inch in front of them, until a flicker of lightning showed the gateway and its tall posts. The gate was open.

"I suppose you know the way better than I do," she ventured to suggest as he drove through, scraping the off-wheel as he did so, "but I'm going to remind you that, about twenty yards from here, there's a rather bad ditch, so keep well to the right. Hullo, though!—where are you going? Aren't you driving up a bank? I'm sure you are. This isn't the road." Another flare of lightning showed her the scared ob-

long of Bransby's face and his hands tugging unskilfully at the bewildered mare's mouth. They were half-way up a steep bank to the right. Again they drove on a little way in some order, but Barbara had now gathered herself together alert, ready to spring, when the final *fiasco* came, as she felt it must. True to the courtesy of the craft, she had not once laid her hands on Bransby's fingers. Another flash of rose-white glare, another wild plunging to right and left. Again the lightning. She saw the mare's glistening back, for an instant, as she reared desperately, then found herself, all of a sudden, sprawled out upon the warm, palpitating body of the fallen brute. She got at once to her feet, felt for the horse's head, and, grasping the bit, shouted to Bransby. He answered frantically,—

"Yes. I'm not hurt. I'm coming. Are you safe, Mrs. Dering? Thank God! Where's the mare? She's run away, I suppose."

"No, she hasn't," Barbara called back. "Don't come any nearer yet,—she might strike you in scrambling up. So, my pet! So, my beauty! There you are!"

She patted and soothed the mare, who was once more on her legs trembling and snorting with fright. The rain now fell in torrents, and the thunder was dying away towards the south-east.

"Thank you a thousand, thousand times, Mrs. Dering!" gasped forth Bransby, limping up. "How very brave of you to stand by the mare! Are you sure you're all right? I've hurt my knee somehow. Nothing of any consequence, but it's rather hard for me to walk. Ugh!" he ended, with a wheezing sound, squeezed from him by pain. The hissing darkness

surrounded them for miles, and they could only guess their whereabouts by the now infrequent glimpses of the lightning.

XXXI.

Barbara could not help laughing at their absolute helplessness. The rippling, human, healthy sound rang out through the streaming night, and at once Bransby felt his nerves steadied and his heart cheered in spite of himself. He was conscious, with a strange little pang, that his ideal woman would be sadly out of place in this situation, and that Eunice's trailing skirt and long trousers would be absolute disadvantages where the scorned russet boots and short habit were now shown to be so sensible.

"If your knee is hurt, Mr. Bransby," she said, when she had conquered her desire for mirth, "why don't you get into the trap? I can guess the way pretty well, and I'll lead the mare, until we're in the road."

"Impossible!" whistled Bransby, who was now clinching his under lip with his teeth. "I could not think of allowing you to do such a thing."

"But if you faint, it will be ten times harder for me," said Barbara, practically; "and I can tell by your voice that you are suffering a great deal. Do let me help you into the wagon."

"No, no!" moaned Bransby. They went on slowly for a few yards.

"Mr. Bransby!" called Barbara, suddenly.

"Yes," he whispered back, in faint tones.

There was now a watery glimmer as of coming moon-

light. Objects could be seen in blurry masses. She ventured to leave the mare's head and run to Bransby.

"What is it? Are you worse?" she asked.

"I do not know. I feel very giddy," he replied.

"How is your knee hurt?" she then demanded. "Is it sprained or cut?"

"Cut, I think."

"Good heavens, man! you may be bleeding to death! It may be an artery!"

Her voice was anxious for the first time, and, kneeling down, she peremptorily rolled up his trouser and felt his knee. A jet of soft, warm fluid at once shot through her fingers, splashing her cheek and breast. She said nothing to Bransby, but, taking off one of her elastic garters and feeling for the silver skewer which fastened her braids in place, began deftly to arrange a tourniquet above the knee-cap. Bransby was by this time so faint that he leaned heavily against the back of the buck-board without offering any remonstrance.

"I must hurt you a little, Mr. Bransby," she said presently, as her strong hands continued to twist the improvised ligature, "and when I have this as tight as I can make it, you must help me by trying to hold it in place, and then get into the cart. I'm afraid you've hurt yourself very badly."

"Yes," said Bransby, in a queer, far-away voice, and then all at once he doubled up in a heap, against her shoulder. For the first time, Barbara felt desperate. The mare was only standing still, from sheer bewilderment, and might tear off at any moment, dashing the buck-board to pieces and scaring poor Eunice terribly. Then she would be left alone, for an indefinite length of time, in this glimmering darkness, with her arch-enemy swooning on her shoulder, and only her twisted

garter between him and death. Again she felt an almost ungovernable laughter welling within her, but shut her lips firmly and refused to give way to the inappropriate desire. Then she thought of hallooing for help, but was afraid to do this on account of the mare.

"She—she stands very well," murmured Bransby, coming partially to his senses. "Where am I? What's the matter?"

"Lie still! Lie still!" said Barbara, irritably. "You've cut an artery, I'm afraid, and it's all I can do to keep this tourniquet tight enough. Please lie still. I'm very strong; I don't feel your weight at all."

Bransby was too faint and dazed to resist, and let his head drop back upon one of the broad shoulders which he had so often sneered at as "unfeminine." Barbara was suddenly aware of a crisp, curt sound, and knew that the mare was cropping the wet clover.

"Thank God!" she could not help exclaiming.

"For what?" said poor Bransby.

"Why, the mare is grazing. I couldn't leave you, and I was afraid that she would bolt and frighten Eunice. How do you feel now?"

"Dizzy," said Bransby, trying to lift his head. "Very dizzy," he gulped, letting it fall back again.

"Do you happen to have a flask of brandy about you?" asked Barbara.

"I—I—have not touched a drop of liquor, for fifteen years. I would not touch it now, though I were dying."

"The devil you wouldn't!" said Barbara, with stern unconsciousness of her strong language. "If I had some brandy here, we should soon see whether you'd take it or not."

She gave him a slight shake in her vexation.

"Mrs. Dering!—Mrs. Dering!" murmured poor Bransby, "you—you—you have saved my life. I thank you. But—but—such expressions! Eunice,—you are her friend. It—it is terrible—to hear a woman use such—such——" His head dropped and he fainted again. Then Barbara gave way and laughed heartily, though somewhat drearily.

"To think of my using such masculine language to such a lady-like little man!" she said, at last. "Why, I actually said 'the devil' to him! I doubt if he ever speaks to me again!" And a rhyme that she had once read, in some magazine, began to run in her head:

> "And I own I fairly revel
> In the way that you say 'devil,'
> Jeannie Welsh Carlyle."

All at once she saw a small, blurred gleam moving uncertainly in the murky distance, then another and another. Her heart gave a relieved jump. She knew that these will-o-wispish lights were the lanterns of those whom Eunice had sent out to look for Bransby. When the men had lifted him into the buck-board and she sat beside him still grasping the tourniquet, she realized for the first time, with a horrified shiver, that he might have died out there against her shoulder.

It was not until the doctor had come and gone and Bransby was safe in bed that she dared laugh again. And this she did, until Eunice declared her hysterical and brought her a foaming milk-punch which she had shaken with her own hands.

The next day Barbara had one of her severe headaches, and her head was found to have been badly bruised, in spite of her thick hair. Eunice insisted on keeping her with her, for a week at least, and Fair was

sent for and comfortably established in a sunny room next to the children's nursery. The week lengthened into a fortnight and the fortnight into a month and still Barbara remained.

It was the last of May, before Bransby, whose wound had been followed by a fever, was allowed to come down and lie upon a sofa in the library, although he had moved, from room to room, up-stairs. Barbara, who was sitting there when he was brought in, offered to read to him. Bransby accepted this offer before Mrs. Crosdill's dark figure unsheathed itself from the long white muslin curtains at one of the windows.

"*I* have been looking forward to the pleasure of reading to you, Godfrey, for many weeks," she said.

Bransby looked appealingly from one woman to the other, and Barbara said at once, with her ready good humor,—

"Why, of course, Mrs. Crosdill. I should never have offered had I known that you were in the room. But can't I find a book for you? What shall it be? —a novel?"

"Yes; a novel, please," murmured Bransby.

"A *standard* romance, Mrs. Dering," added his sister.

"Well," announced Barbara, from her perch on the step-ladder. "Here is a beautiful edition of Thackeray. It makes one long to read him. Really, I can't see what more you could ask than 'Henry Esmond' illustrated by George du Maurier."

"Yes; let it be Henry Esmond.' I haven't read that since I was a boy."

"Ah, yes," echoed Mrs. Crosdill, "that is the book in which that lovely scene occurs where those verses from the Psalms are quoted. Pray let me have that, Mrs. Dering. And how charmingly it is illustrated!

This young girl coming down-stairs,—she is like that portrait of Marianne Bransby by Reynolds, is she not, Godfrey? And here is a—— My *dear* Godfrey!" she exclaimed, closing the heavy volume with a clack, "is it possible that Thackeray wrote of such—such indecencies!"

"What indecencies? What indecencies, Lydia?" asked Bransby, nervously.

"Why, there is, in this book,"—she dropped it suddenly on a table near by as though contaminated,—"there is, in *that* book an illustration, actually an illustration,—I am almost ashamed to utter the words,—but a drawing of a man—kissing—a—woman's—foot." The last word was spoken in an almost inaudible whisper. "And people have Thackeray's works in their household library!—free to their children! Why, Winifred may have looked at that very picture—your innocent child, Godfrey!"

"What picture?" demanded Winifred, appearing suddenly as though by magic, with a large silver mug of milk clasped to her soiled pinafore, and a large slice of brown-bread and honey in the other hand! "That be-yeutiful picture where Mr. Esmond kisses Miss Beatrix's foot? Of course I've seen it, an' it's lovely. An' don't you say horrid things about it, Aunt Lydia, because you jes' dote on bishops, an' people used to kiss *their* feet."

Barbara, who had been sitting on the top of the step-ladder, during this scene, her brows lifted and her hands clasped about her knees, nodded sly encouragement to Winifred, during that young lady's fiery speech.

"An'—an'," continued Win, waxing bolder and bolder, "it ain't horrid at all, 'cause I've seen Barbara's

husban' kiss *her* foot, and it looked so pretty that I've played it with Mr. and Mrs. Bridegroom, in my doll's house, so there!"

Barbara was in convulsions of silent mirth, Bransby staring helplessly, and Mrs. Crosdill literally stupefied with conflicting emotions. Then she said, in a low venomous voice, to her brother,—

"This comes from allowing your wife to choose her own companions against your wishes!" After which gracious speech she left the room.

"Father," said Winifred, her voice tremulous with passion, "I think Aunt Lydia's a wicked woman to say such things at Barbara. An' after Barbara saved your life, too! An' I b'leeve it's all because you couldn't *make* anybody kiss *her* higious ole feet. An'——"

"Hush!" cried Bransby, with such explosive force that Win's red mouth shut like a trap, and she turned and walked solemnly back into the dining-room, to finish her lunch.

"Well, Mr. Bransby," said Barbara, demurely, "shall I read 'Henry Esmond' to you, or is its immorality really too great?"

"My sister has—er—very strong feelings about such things," he answered, nervously.

"Does she really think it wrong for Esmond to have kissed Beatrix's foot?"

"Er—er—I fancy it is more a question of—er—of refinement."

"But a pretty foot is considered a sign of refinement, is it not? Surely such an act is only a chivalrous homage. What possible immorality could there have been in Esmond's touching his lips to Beatrix's instep?"

"I—er—these things are, of course, a matter of

taste. I myself do not see any exact *immorality* in it, but—er——"

"Oh, well! I suppose it depends upon the foot and the man," said Barbara, laughing. "Beatrix had a pretty foot and Esmond a gallant nature. I can't imagine Calvin's kissing his sweetheart's foot, for example, or Coriolanus, or Jack Cade, or Orson, or—or—Bishop Cammersell, for that matter!"

"My dear Mrs. Dering!"

"Why do you exclaim so?" asked Barbara, malevolently. "Is there anything in the Thirty-nine Articles against a bishop's kissing his sweetheart's foot?"

"No,—no; of course not! Only these things have a shocking sound to an orthodox Christian's ears. I am sure you mean no harm, but I fear that you are very, very unorthodox."

"I am," said Barbara, briefly.

"I have even heard that you are an infidel."

"No; that I deny," she said, with sudden sternness.

"Then, would you mind telling me your exact views?" he said, with a kind of anxiety.

"Yes," she answered, "I should, for three reasons: first, because I have no fixed, rigid form of belief; secondly, because my views would be sure to clash with yours, and I do not like religious discussions; and, thirdly, because I am answerable to God alone for my thoughts and beliefs."

"I hope that I have not made you angry," said Bransby.

He was conscious of a curious change in his feelings towards her ever since the night when her presence of mind had saved his life. Merely feminine attributes had not been so solely valuable to him since that time. While he continued to require them in his wife, he had

come to the conclusion that, in his neighbor's wife, he did not altogether disapprove of the lack of them, in moderation. His feeling of gratitude had also dulled the edge of his dislike for her. She had even a curious charm for him which was something like that exercised by the wreathings of brightly-colored serpents behind protecting sheets of glass. Her unconventionalities, and what, to him, were her irreverences, almost her blasphemies, acted like a tonic on his torpid vitality, now made feebler and more languid than ever, by the low fever through which he had just passed. He was like the friend of St. Augustine, who, having allowed himself to look upon the forbidden sight of the circus, continued to gaze at it, with more and more absorbing interest, until finally its fascination overcame him and he could not coerce his unwilling eyes into submission. Bransby, while disapproving of Barbara's ideas and ethics, as strongly as ever, had become unwillingly enthralled by her keen personal charm, although this was a fact which he did not admit to himself. He took occasion for stating calmly, in his very long prayers, that he was forcing himself to take an interest in Barbara on his wife's account, since she, Eunice, persisted in having her for a friend.

It was his plain duty, he explained to Providence, to try to soften Mrs. Dering's wild views of life, since she was the chosen and intimate companion of the woman he had promised to cherish. He ended by asking Providence to bless his poor endeavors and to enable him to conquer his dislike for the object of his prayers.

He was somewhat astonished, in the present instance, to find how anxiously he waited to hear that he had not made her angry, and how relieved he was when she assured him that he had not done so. At the same

time he was aware, with a fantastic incongruity, that he had ceased objecting to the faint dusting of freckles which made her pale skin bloomy. When this change had taken place, he could not precisely remember, and it was certainly not in answer to prayer. He made a sudden restless movement, and she stopped her favorite trick of gazing out of window and came towards him.

"You look uncomfortable. I will beat up your pillows for you," she said, kindly.

As she bent over him Bransby caught the sea-like perfume of her hair, and glancing up, saw that there were little flecks of gold in the brown of her grave eyes. He caught his breath suddenly.

"Are you in pain?" she asked, arranging the last pillow. "Shall I call Eunice to loosen the bandages?"

"No, no!" he said, hastily. "I would be very grateful if you would read to me. Anything you choose. Take a book at random."

He closed his eyes listlessly, but could still see, as though they had been open, the wreath of her bright hair, the soft flow of her silkish, gray-blue gown, and the stir of a dark rose-bud which she had fastened at her breast.

XXXII.

Barbara was also beginning to think that she had done Bransby injustice. Seen through the magnifying-glass of every-day contact, certain virtues became apparent and certain faults assumed that interesting quality which characterizes most unpleasant things, thus closely scrutinized under a powerful lens. Bar-

bara wondered at the consistency with which he pursued his uncomfortable principles. As soon as he was able, he left the reclining-chair, which he had been obliged to use while an invalid, and remained for hours sitting bolt upright in the most uncomfortable attitude. For recreation he was reading Renan's "Life of Christ," on which he had a lock put, that he might turn the key in it when he wished to lay aside his book, thus assuring himself that none of the feminine portion of his household should be contaminated, by even a glance between such infidel pages. He acknowledged once to Barbara that the work caused him much more pain than pleasure, but that he felt it to be his duty to master all Atheistic arguments that he might arm himself with suitable and logical replies.

As for Barbara, she had grown quite at her ease with him,—even ventured to tease him, and, at times, to make sly fun of his ruling theories, when Mrs. Crosdill was not by. He would smile stiffly and anxiously, under her quizzing, with that nervous compression of the lips that seems to imply a fear of their splitting at the corners. But when his sister happened to be present, a comical look of appeal would creep over his pale and artificial little face, and his eyes would flit nervously from her to Barbara and then back, after a fashion that only aggravated his tormentor's demure malevolence.

Mrs. Crosdill's dislike, on the other hand, increased as her brother's lessened, until she distinctly hated their guest, and wrote long letters of piously-worded innuendo to Bishop Cammersell as the only means of relieving her surcharged spirit.

Without hinting such a thing to Eunice, Barbara had determined, in her heart, to reform and revitalize

Bransby, as much as possible, even if, to accomplish this end, she had to use a series of shocks on her subject's nerves as startling and quite as wholesome as those given by an electric battery. For instance, she sent for her banjo, on which she thrummed passably, and began to sing old negro and Scotch and Irish melodies and love-songs to the entranced children, tuning the instrument to such a low pitch, in order to suit her low voice, that the slack strings scarcely gave forth more than a drowsy humming. This method had to be resorted to, because Barbara's knowledge of her banjo was limited, and she had not more than four or five sets of chords at her command. What there was of her voice, however, had a certain delicious quality.

At first Bransby contented himself with not interfering. One evening, however, as she was sitting at sunset on the steps of the old stone porch at the back of the house, singing to Lois and Win, while they ate their supper of bread and milk, he came up and formally asked her if she knew a certain version of "Abide with me," which he particularly admired. Fortunately, although her repertoire did not include many hymns, she did happen to know the very one that he wished to hear, and sang it to him as soon as she could settle upon the accompaniment.

Lois and Win, who were seated opposite each other at a very small white, wooden table, waited decorously enough until she was through; but as soon as she stopped banged loudly with both mugs and spoons and demanded "Nelly Grey" and "Widow Machree." Barbara compromised by giving them "Robin Adair."

"But how can you ask me to sing," she broke off suddenly, "when there's such a voice as Eunice's in the house? What a revelation she would make of

Robin! It's too bad she never sings now! It's a shame not to have a piano here! Do send for one, Mr. Bransby!—do! and make Eunice sing you 'Robin Adair.'"

He moved and gave his uneasy smile. "You forget I am really sincere in my doubts about music."

"Oh, ho!" said Barbara to herself. "His *doubts!* He used to be quite, quite sure, when I first met him that music was an invention of the Evil One." To him she said, laughing,—

"Oh, don't be so consistent! The only good in making up one's mind is in watching the pleasure one's friends get out of pulling it to pieces. It's exactly the principle on which Lois and Win make gardens. Isn't it, dears? Why, there wouldn't be an atom of fun in raking a bed quite smooth to-day and sowing pounds and pounds of seed in it, unless you meant to hoe it all up to-morrow. Would there, now? Ah, do get a piano! A house without a piano is like a letter without a stamp, or a dolly without a squeak. Isn't it, Lolo?"

"Thert'ny ith," said Lois, rounding her solemn eyes upon her father, and scrubbing even the tip of her pink tongue on her napkin in order to perform the duty of wiping her button-hole mouth, with absolute conscientiousness. Win did not say anything. In fact, she was rather frightened at Barbara's boldness.

The next day, as Bransby was standing by one of the drawing-room windows, looking out over the spring lawn, his sister came up and remained silently near him. They were both watching a little procession which was making its way over the grass to the great elms near the centre of the lawn. Barbara, tall and gay, in a soft, pale-pink muslin gown, led the way, her

baby over her shoulder, its head, in its little white sun-bonnet, making a daisy-like nodding. After her, trotted Win and Lois, also with white sun-bonnets, and, last of all, came Eunice, rather pale, under her parasol of lilac silk. They saw Barbara toss her banjo and book upon the grass, then throw herself down like a child and roll about, shaking convulsive chuckles from Fair, whom she held high overhead in both hands. Eunice settling herself near by, smiled at the ecstatic little creature and gave it the round ivory handle of her parasol to clutch.

"What very extraordinary antics Mrs. Dering permits herself!" said Mrs. Crosdill, suddenly, in her thin, curdled tones. Bransby started and changed color.

"I did not know that any one was in the room," he said, with some nervousness.

"I am very sorry if I startled you, Godfrey. But do look! I beg of you to look! Even with your changed views you must confess that it's rather shocking to see a baby given a banjo for a plaything!"

"My changed views, Lydia? What do you mean? Yes! yes! I see the banjo. I must confess that I should not like Eunice to own one, but we must not make Procrustean beds of our views."

Mrs. Crosdill looked at him sharply, never having heard of Procrustes, and inclined to suspect that this strange term applied to beds was some of Barbara's unorthodox and dangerous teaching.

"Touch pitch and one knows what follows," she said, tartly.

"How do you mean 'touch pitch,' Lydia? Whom do you refer to? 'Touch pitch!' It is not a very nice expression. Not at all the sort of expression which you generally use."

This was not calculated to soothe Mrs. Crosdill.

"My dear Godfrey, excuse me if I say that you know very well to what I allude. Did I not actually hear that woman trying to persuade you,—*you*, to admit a piano into this house? And did you, or did you not, listen patiently? After all these years spent on disciplining Eunice in the matter, too! I shall not be surprised to hear that you allow secular music to be played and sung under your roof on Sunday, next thing! And do you think that you are doing your duty, in letting your innocent children partake in the gambols of that hoyden? Do you think her negro-minstrel songs are calculated to improve them mentally, or to aid you in your system of education for them? You seem to have grown blind, in the twinkling of an eye, as poor St. Paul did. I only hope that God, in His mercy, will see fit to lighten your darkness. Why, the very color of the woman's hair is enough to warn you against her! Such violence! Such boldness! Who ever heard of a genteel, refined Christian woman with crimson, yes, *crimson* hair?"

Bransby was intensely vexed, all the more so that he felt his sister's reproach to be in some measure merited.

"Excuse me, Lydia, if I call your attention to the fact that you are being as unreasonable, in holding Mrs. Dering to account for her hair, as you would be in blaming an Indian for the color of his skin."

"'Skin!' Such a disagreeable word,—'skin!'" murmured his sister in parenthesis.

"I must say," he continued,—"I must say that you show a personal feeling against Mrs. Dering which is quite apart from what you might naturally feel against her mistaken theories and ideas."

In reply to this daring speech she drew herself quite an inch taller and left the room. After hesitating, for a second, Bransby went to join the group on the sunny lawn.

He found Barbara trying to prize a katydid from Fair's tense fingers without doing violence to the large-eyed insect. Fair was too deeply interested in baffling her mother's humane attempt to think of protesting in any other way until poor katy was finally rescued, upon which she set up a loud roar, shaping her small mouth to the exact likeness of a tragic-mask and blotting her eyes from sight.

"Here, Fair, don't cwy, *don't* cwy!" urged Lois, unable to endure the sight of such anguish. "Here's a cwicket, a bootiful, bwown cwicket." And as Fair stopped short, in the midst of a howl and stared inquiringly through great tear-blobs, Lois extended her pink fist, against which a young grasshopper was bracing his hinge-like legs in a desperate effort to escape.

It took all of Barbara's witch-like knowledge of child-nature to convince Lois that she was not a cruel mamma and, at the same time, to rouse her pity for the grasshopper which Fair was so anxious to dismember; but peace reigned at last, and Lois grew absorbed in watching a pretty Alderney heifer that was lying in the shade of a horse-chestnut.

Presently she said, in a lowered voice,—

"Barbara, what ith the doing?"

"Ruminating, my dear," answered Bransby, who had become anxious of late to appear more interested in his children.

"Woominating?" said Lois, her small brow perplexed. "Woominating? She *lookth* ath if the were eating herthelf." Whereat Bransby, rather discon-

certed, joined a faint note of laughter to the merry peal that came from Barbara and Eunice.

After a while the children began to beg to go to the corn-house, and Eunice offered to take Fair to her room with her, as she said that the glare was beginning to give her a headache. Bransby decided to join the expedition, and the four set off along a pretty path which led through a field of clover.

The corn-house was a weather-grayed, square structure, standing on locust posts near the ice-pond, and through the open slats could be seen the ivory-colored ears of maize slanting nearly against the roof of one side.

"They look like giants' teeth grinning at us," observed Win, who printed blood-curdling fairy-stories in pencil on the margins of old magazines, much to Mrs. Crosdill's disgust.

"Oh, don't, Win! How horrid!" protested Lois, sidling closer to Barbara.

Bransby here undertook to give Win a lesson in literary composition.

"That isn't what we call a good simile, Winifred, my dear," he said, speaking very distinctly, "because there is nothing that could represent the mouths of the giants. It is quite impossible that the side of a building should remind you of the mouth of a giant."

Win skipped along cheerful and unimpressed.

"I wasn't talkin' 'bout mouths; I was talkin' 'bout *teeth*. They *do* look like teeth, don't they, Barbara?"

"But people never have but two rows of teeth," objected her father, "and, on every ear of corn, there are at least ten. You see you are still exaggerating, my daughter."

"Well, that's the fun of it," exclaimed Win. "Be-

sides, Uncle Hezekiah Johnson's got three rows, 'cause I made him open his mouth an' let me see,—an' it was true!"

"Ith thplendid to play dentitht with 'em," added Lois, gravely.

"To play dentist?" repeated Bransby.

"Yeth; we dig holeth in the gwainth and then fill 'em with the thilver off of bottleth."

This almost incomprehensible sentence Barbara had to translate to him, whereat he gave way to a puzzled smile and dropped the subject.

Inside of the corn-house was a dusty, sweet-smelling gloom, pierced here and there by rays from the brilliant day without. The large room was divided off at one end, and in the smaller apartment some sitting hens clucked warningly as they entered. The children fell at once into a game of romps, scrambling up the steep and uncertain bank of corn and laughing as they slid back upon the floor with each effort. At first Barbara joined in their fun, but finally grew so warm that she climbed up a ladder which had been placed against one wall and seated herself, with her book in her lap, on a sort of ledge which allowed her feet to rest upon the top of the mound of corn. Bransby followed her and sat down beside her. She had taken off her large straw hat and was fanning herself with it. At each vigorous gust, the tendril-like curls above her forehead lifted themselves on end and gave forth a rich sparkle.

Her cheeks reddened and paled under her quick heart-beats, and her laughing lips were a little parted. Bransby could feel how wan and meagre he must look, beside this glowing condensation of life and health. He thought, without reserve, that in her girlish pink

gown, and with the noble curve of her head bare, she was the most beautiful human being that he had ever seen. That magnetism which, for some time past, he had begun to feel, drew him now so powerfully that, without being conscious of it, he moved a little closer to her, along the dusty ledge.

"Isn't it nice here?" she asked, gayly, roused by his movements. "I dote on a genuine old Virginian corn-house, don't you?"

Bransby gazed at her almost solemnly, and said, in measured tones,—

"It may seem strange to you, but I do not think that I was ever in one before, not even as a child."

"Poor, poor you!" returned Barbara, shaking her head. "Didn't you think it was *right* to enter a corn-house?" she then added, with some mischief. Bransby flushed.

"I am convinced that you do not credit me with a single natural impulse, Mrs. Dering," he said, stiffly.

"Not that exactly; but I do think that you cry to most of them as the cockney's wife in 'Lear' did to the eels when she put them i' the paste alive. She rapp'd 'em o' the coxcomb with a stick and cry'd, 'Down, wantons, down!'" But Bransby did not smile.

"I consider," he remarked, "that we are put into this world to curb our natural inclinations."

"And I," returned Barbara, "that we are meant to develop them, in the right direction."

"Of course I recognize, Mrs. Dering, that our philosophies differ widely; I am a very orthodox man, while you—pardon me—but indeed I think that you will not deny that you are quite the opposite."

"Quite," assented Barbara.

"Now this—pardon me again—but I cannot consider this exactly feminine."

"Of course you mean according to your views of what is feminine, Mr. Bransby."

"Of course; but my views are the generally accepted views."

"Oh, no!" Barbara could not help exclaiming. "I don't think that you can quite say that."

"I should have said, perhaps, that they are the generally accepted views among a certain class of people. I really think, Mrs. Dering, that you are your own worst enemy."

He looked at her anxiously and somewhat deprecatingly, but she was not in the least vexed. She rolled up the flimsy hat and made a little cushion of it to lean her head back upon.

"I suppose you mean that my views and habits shock some people."

"Well—er—yes," he admitted, nervously.

"But suppose that they don't shock the people for whose opinions I really care?"

"Ah, but sometimes I fear they do! Now, Bishop Cammersell, for instance——"

"What would you think of me," here interrupted Barbara, "if I told you that I really do not care for Bishop Cammersell's good opinion?"

"I could not believe *that*, Mrs. Dering!"

"Nevertheless, it is quite true. I think that Bishop Cammersell is timid and conventional and altogether incapable of owning a sturdy original conviction."

"You pain me very much," said Bransby, in a lowered voice.

"I am sorry," she replied, "but I should not care for you to grow to like me better, on a false basis."

"Yes; your complete honesty is a trait that I always admire," he put in, almost eagerly.

"And as for always curbing our natural inclinations, I cannot think that God endowed us with longings and emotions only that we should make of life one weary war against them."

Bransby fixed his eyes upon her kindling face, and gave himself up to the fascination of her rich voice.

"I would rather live one year fully, freely, richly, and then die, than spend a long, tedious existence of suppressed vitality. Why, it is the great sermon of nature, preached from morning until night, through all living things, whether trees or birds or human beings themselves, that through feeling, and through feeling alone, we reach the highest spirituality. It is only impassioned natures that are capable of martyrdom. If our Lord had not had the very fire of enthusiasm in His soul, He could not have given His life for others upon the cross. It is the pallid, emotionless lives that bring forth nothing. Without motion, great results can never be accomplished, and sensation is the movement of the soul. The ground must be broken before it can bring forth,—mental apathy of all sorts must be disturbed before human beings can produce high results, whether physical or spiritual."

Bransby continued to gaze at her intently, his eyes gathering a still, absent expression.

She went on:

"I think that, in keeping our impulses always crushed and unexpressed, we act like some mothers, who refuse to let their darling boys go to school, and so instil into them a certain milk of missishness which all the events of after-life can never quite absorb. I think that in being afraid of our passions and emo-

tions, instead of grasping them firmly and kneading them into the right consistency, we are doing ourselves a great wrong, and, so to speak, hiding under napkins such talents as we have."

Bransby said nothing, and she went on:

"For instance, I was thinking about Eunice's beautiful voice to-day, and lamenting to myself over your dislike of music, and by one of those queer coincidences which so often happen to me, I picked up this little copy of Plato's 'Republic,' and it opened at the pages where Socrates talks with Glaucon about the influence of music. I couldn't help contrasting it with the teaching of the 'Kreutzer Sonata' which you so much admire. As I have the book, if you don't mind, I'll read you the bit I'm talking of. Here it is:

"When a man surrenders himself to music and flute-playing, and suffers his soul to be flooded through the funnel of his ears with those sweet and soft, plaintive harmonies of which we just spoke, and spends his whole life in warbling and delighting himself with song, such a man, at the outset, tempers whatever portion of the spirited element he possesses, and makes it useful instead of brittle and useless: if, however, he relaxes not his devotion, but yields to the enchantment, he then begins to liquefy and waste away, till the spirit is melted out of him and the sinews of his soul are extirpated, and he is made a feeble wielder of the lance.'

"There! Do you see the vital difference between the two philosophies? One, Tolstoi's, teaches total abstinence, renunciation even of the good in a thing which may become evil, under certain circumstances,—the other, that even out of evil good may be expected."

"Yes, I can see how you look at it," said Bransby, dreamily.

"And it is the same thing about the idea of love. The sun is fire, and so is a flame kindled from unclean matter, but the flame consumes, while the sun illumines and brings forth all beauty on the earth, which the wise restraint of nature has placed just near enough to the great orb for us to feel its thrilling moderation without being scorched by its excess!"

Her heart, burning with thoughts of Eunice's starved life, urged her vehemently forward.

"When Tolstoi condemns all passionate love between men and women as sensual, surely he does not know in what real love consists. High love, no matter how fiery, never descends into sensuality. It is the great sun blazing in the soul-heaven and kindling into life all exquisite emotions!"

She stopped, breathless, her eyes glowing, her whole face radiant. All at once she felt that Bransby had his arms about her, that his mouth was just about to touch her own.

With one swift movement of her strong body she flung him from her so violently that, losing his balance, he fell sidewise upon the heap of corn, and slid noisily and ungracefully to the floor beneath, heralded by the delighted shouts and caperings of the two children, who had rushed in from the other room, on hearing something fall. Barbara, one blaze of furious indignation, stood to her full height on the ledge above, and, looking down, saw that Eunice was pausing in the open door-way, outlined by the film of her white gown through which the sun was shining.

She returned Barbara's gaze steadfastly, and a curious, pale smile broke the grave shadow of her face. It was a smile that expressed, at the same time, immeasurable disgust and a certain deep relief. For

she felt that now it would be in her power to demand, with reason, those alterations in her life which she had so long desired.

XXXIII.

Barbara had been at Rosemary for two weeks, and the warm fragrance of June now held the spacious mountain air. As yet she had received no further message from Dering, and a feeling of great depression and loneliness had been gathering in her heart.

She sat at the open window of her room to-night and wrote in the pages of her journal, now listlessly, now with a sudden vehemence. All during her life, although at long intervals, Barbara, like most imaginative women, had been given to expressing her moods in verse, and it was in verse that she was writing now. At last she laid aside her pen, and, taking her face between her hands, looked down upon the page before her, and moved her head slowly from side to side with an air of sorrowful negation. Large tears followed, falling slowly and with a distinct, soft sound upon the open book.

The lines were irregular in metre and had a wistful cadence, like the broken murmur of leaves in a night-wind.

> "Dost thou despair, my soul?
> Looking through Sorrow's glass upon the world,
> Sayest thou all promises are unfulfilled?"
> Within, within the voice speaks clear and high,
> And melancholy sweet:
> "Wouldst thou believe in perfect human love?
> Love in that wise;—so comes the promise true.

Hast thou of friendship a divine ideal?
Encloak with such vast generosity
Some life-chilled fellow-creature, and believe.
Doth gratitude evade thee? Ah, poor soul,
Be grateful that such sorrow thou canst feel,
Because the world lacks friendship, love, ideals,
And hath no overflow of gratitude,
To waste on what it cannot touch or see.
To loving eyes, the invisible, O soul,
Holds more of beauty and of very God
Than to eyes scientific starry space entire!
The very blindness of aspiring hearts
More surely draws the unsure, faltering feet
Towards holy surge of harmonies divine,
That, in wide circles, hem the distant Throne
Whereon, forever veiled, sits voiceless Mystery.
Strive, therefore, in thyself, O mournful soul,
To realize in all thine own ideals,
So shalt thou know the capability
That throbs unborn in life;
So shalt thou find all promises fulfilled,
And no more doubt humanity divine."

Presently she got up and went out into the warm, purplish dusk of the night. A rich breeze moved in delicate undulations, heavy with the scent of sun-warmed strawberries, of damask roses, of the intangible perfume of a fringe-tree, which, in the star-pierced gloom, quivered softly, like a sylvan ghost.

Low over the sad outline of the hills, the evening star thrilled through the mystic fabric of the night, like the point of a lance of fire. Small white flowers gleamed through the twilight at her feet. From the shadows, on either side, crimson blossoms burned, with a subdued and smouldering splendor. The thicket was full of birds, the air of wings. In the grass was the stir of a subtle and thronging life.

Barbara walked slowly, her hands behind her head, her eyes upon the scintillating points of the stars, which shone fitfully through the frail and tremulous foliage of the old acacia-trees. What dreams had come to her under their airy branches! What hopes, what yearnings, what aspirations! She drew a deep, unhappy breath, and tried to realize that after all the stars were but as the sands of a golden desert reaching into infinity, not, as she used to imagine, worlds whereon lived creatures like herself, to whom, perhaps, came dreamings such as those which haunted her on summer nights of cloud and shine and gently-pausing winds.

"It cannot be that I am only thirty and that life is over for me," she said, in a low voice, speaking up into the serene vault of air above her. "I cannot think that it is all over." Again tears gathered in her eyes and blotted out the stars. She wandered on and on, and came at last to the low gate, over which a white eglantine festooned itself against the far landscape that resembled, in the wan light, a painting by Puvis de Chavannes.

There was the same bland reach of luminous, pale sky, the same simple masses of great woods enveloped in a tinted haze, the same ample sweep of faint-hued fields. One could fancy austere and lovely figures, in robes of mellow, faded blues and pinks and saffrons, reaping the white clover, with scythes of light. A mocking-bird was filling the leaf-stirred silence with its delicious clamor.

It is on such nights as this that loneliness seems peculiarly dread and unnatural. The whole being cries out for some comprehending soul with which to share such sumptuous loveliness. Barbara lifted her arms and extended them towards the dim horizon-line in

that gesture of yearning with which she expressed certain moods. The empty summer air filled her embrace and beat softly against her breast. It seemed to her that no one in all the world could be so lonely, so forsaken, as herself, and then, as she thought that her heart must break for very desolation, she felt herself clasped close, her head bent back, and the pressure of eager lips upon her own.

"Barbara! Barbara! Barbara!" said Dering, releasing her and kneeling to put his arms again around her. "Will you forgive me, beautiful, good, splendid Barbara? And will you be a little sorry for me? Oh, my wife, my life, how I have missed you! How I have hungered and thirsted for you!—for your unfailing sympathy,—your gentle advice,—all your noble self, from head to foot, mind, soul, and body! If you could only know,—if I could only get words to tell you,—I think that you would forgive me, would comfort me, would take me back, my one love!"

Barbara could not speak. She trembled and put her hands upon his thick curls, as he knelt there in the starlight, at her feet. At last she felt that he was waiting for her answer, and managed to stammer, brokenly,—

"I do, I do, dearest; but I thought—I was afraid—oh, Jock, I was afraid that you did not care—that you would never care any more!"

She felt his arms tighten convulsively, and he hid his face in the folds of her gown some moments before he spoke again. Then he said, whispering,—

"Darling, I don't think that you'll know your old Jock. He's a very new person in a great many ways."

"Not in too many ways, I hope, dear," she said, with her kindly-beautiful smile. Then, stooping, she kissed

his hair. "A very thin Jock, I'm sorry to see," she added, pityingly. "Dearest, tell me, have you been ill?"

"Oh, nothing much,—nothing serious. I had a slow fever in Japan. Ah, Barbara! one can do a lot of thinking during a slow fever."

He got to his feet and put his arm about her. Together they leaned and looked out at the meditative beauty of the great meadows. They did not say anything more, for a long while. Then Dering spoke, still in that low, controlled tone, as though afraid of waking some sleeping danger:

"We must begin all over again, darling, if you will bear with me and forgive me. I think that I have conquered that ugly self of mine. I dare not say that I have, but indeed, indeed, I think I have. And you will help me to struggle with it, in case it ever should come back."

"And you," said Barbara, her voice thick with tears,—"you will be patient with my faults,—you will help me,—you will forgive me, too."

"Yes, yes, my darling. I know that you are too great, too wise, too absolutely free from vanity to want me to tell you that you have no faults, but, oh! Barbara, compared to mine they are such little, little faults, I feel that if——"

She turned and closed his lips with a shy kiss.

"You shall not abuse my husband to me," she whispered.

Pierced to the heart with her beauty and sweetness, he held her against him for some moments in silence.

"And I have many plans for work in the world outside, dearest," he said, after a while. "I want to knock out some evil before I am stowed away under the sod.

You will be glad to hear this, and about women especially,—about factory-girls. I want to build club-houses for them in the large towns, where they can find rest and recreation."

"Oh, Jock! you warm my very soul!" she cried. "How life has changed for me in the last ten minutes! I thought that I was to be alone, all the rest of my life."

"And how it has changed for me!" he echoed. "I knew how generous you were. I felt that you would forgive at last, but indeed, indeed, darling, I never hoped that you would take me to your heart at once like this. And are *you* well, my own?—and the child? Barbara, what a fiend I was! You are an angel to forgive me so soon! And the Bransbys, how are they? And that dear Mrs. Crosdill——"

Barbara began to laugh and shake back her hair.

"Why, Mrs. Crosdill was married last Thursday, to Bishop Cammersell, my dear. I have been thinking ever since how you would gloat over that! She says that it is to be a mother to his nine children, but I fancy that the gentle bishop will find that he has a wife as well!"

"Well, yes, rather," said Dering, with his drawl. "How the mischief could he put up with her? By gad! that does beat me."

"It's like those classic earwigs spoken of so long ago in the pages of 'Punch.' Don't you remember? A little girl is watching them crawl along a bench, and after asking her aunt what they are, she says, 'Ugh! how can such horrid things associate with each other?'"

Dering laughed, and then asked how Bransby and Eunice liked the marriage.

"Oh, *he*, of course, is ecstatic," rejoined Barbara,

with that expressive curl of her lip. "As for Eunice, it is rather a relief to her, as it will prevent those long visitations which she used to dread so. Dearest Jocko, you will like Eunice more than ever, I am sure. We are closer than ever, and she is growing broader-minded and more splendid in every way, each day that she lives."

"What lots of good you have done her, my sweetheart!" said Dering, eagerly. "I think every life that touches yours is made better and higher."

With hands clasped and cheeks together they watched the dull rose-hued edge of the rising moon peer above the violet band of the horizon. In their hearts was that deep stillness which comes with hope that has outlived despair.

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